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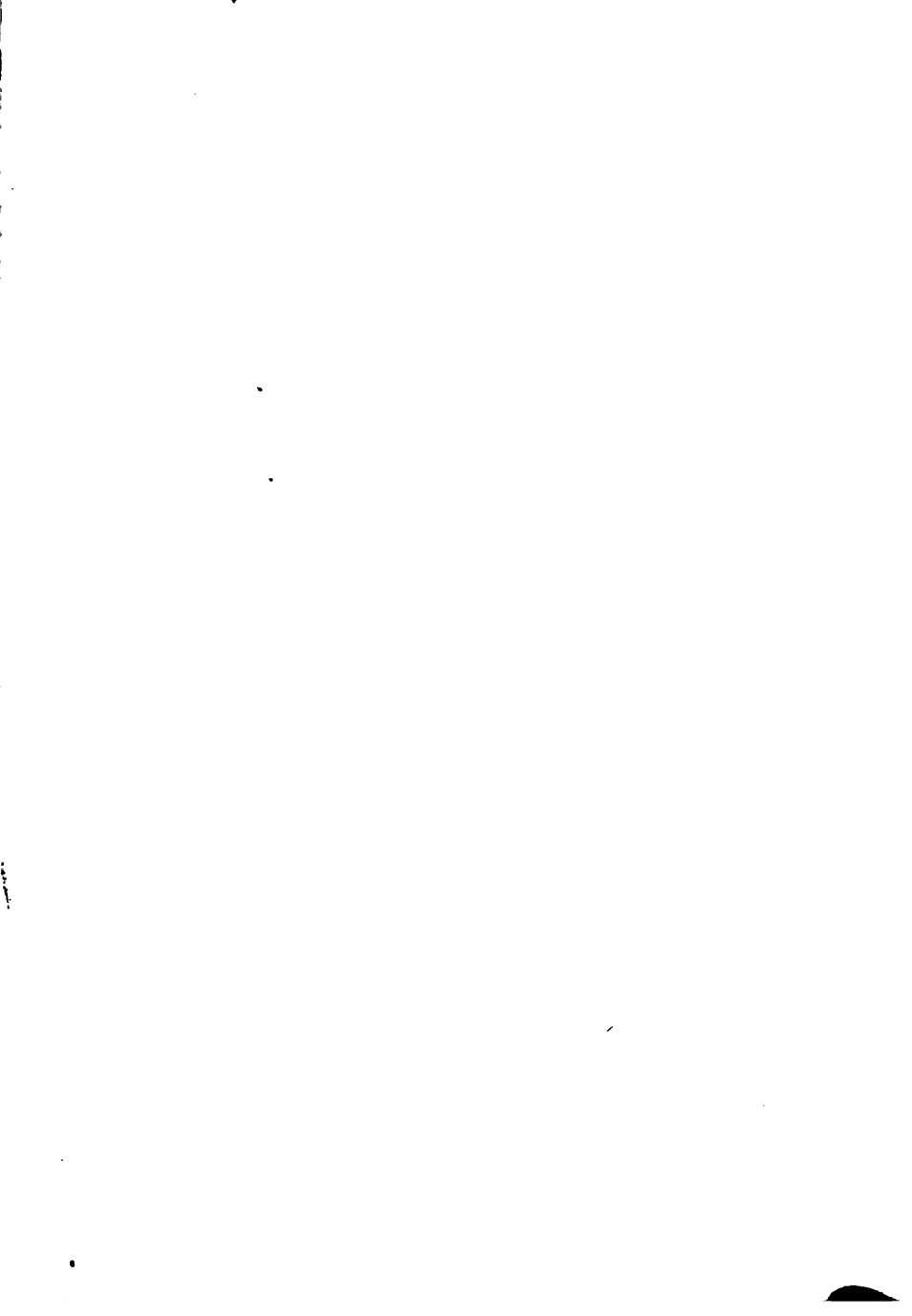
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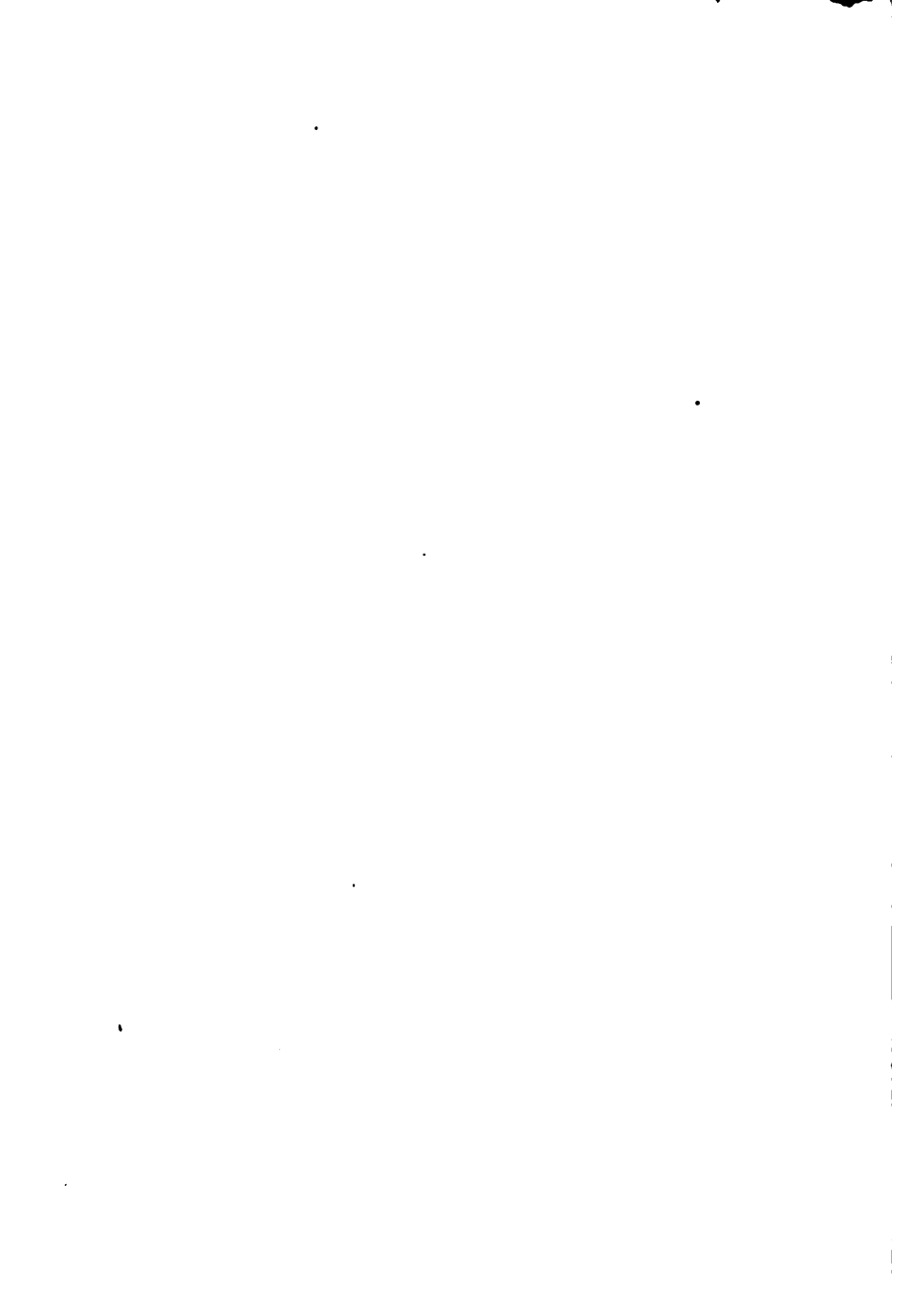


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THE GROPER

THE GROPER

BY

HENRY G. AIKMAN

Armstrong, Donald Hunter



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TO VIVID
IMAGINATION

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TO
ADA M.
WHO HELPS ME KEEP ON GROPING
H. G. A.

753658

THE GROPER

PART ONE

I

LEE HILLQUIT never quite lost the vivid impressions of that last Sunday afternoon at Chatham. Later on in life, he had only to close his eyes to visualise the whole familiar scene—and with it, all his delicate, soaring happiness.

Below them, at the foot of the hill—euphemistically known as Mount Phillis—Lake Chatham stretched off in the form of a casual letter S. Two miles north, at the very head of the lake, they could make out the town itself: its three church spires piercing the surf of green leaves; the cupola of the courthouse dominating the other downtown buildings; and off to the extreme right, the tall, brick smokestack of the Chatham Dairy Company.

Lee felt, rather than took direct note of, this sunlit panorama. All his conscious faculties—his whole being—were focussed upon the very pretty girl who sat at his right, a foot higher up the hill. Lee, half reclining on the grass, supporting himself on his elbow, looked up into her eyes and doubted if so wonderful a person had ever lived before.

Vera Wakefield did not return Lee's devotional gaze, but instead contemplated the lake below, with a preoccupied expression that seemed faintly wistful.

How profitless to set about describing an elusive personal charm! Details come easily enough: Vera's features, for example, were good, if not distinctive; her abundant, neatly coiffured hair, a light, lustreless brown; her eyes clear blue, yet indefinitely nebulous at times. She had a way of looking up at people—the white of her eye showing beneath the iris—with an effect of appealing trustfulness. Her skin remained brown with summer tan; and on each cheek were sprinkled a few honest freckles. But such *minutiae* lamentably fail to capture the real Vera. Very likely her attractiveness was partly compounded of her freshness, her youth, her flaming healthfulness—and partly of that vague air of smartness that most young American girls somehow achieve. Nothing could have been more informal than Vera's costume—low-collared blouse, navy-blue skirt, tan stockings and pumps; yet nothing could have suggested a more alluring trimness.

To an idealistic youth of twenty-three, however, all such speculation would have seemed worse than futile. Lee Hillquit could not possibly have analysed the emotion that suffused him. He only knew he loved Vera unreservedly—with a shy, spiritual sort of love.

At length, she broke the silence.

"To-morrow, at this time, you'll be in Detroit."

"Yes." Lee followed her gaze across Lake Chatham. "And I don't dare think how I'm going to miss you."

They watched a billowy white cloud—its scalloped edges sharply defined against the blue September sky—come swiftly up over the hills that bordered the west bank of the lake.

Abruptly, he took her soft, well-formed hand in his

"Are you going to marry me, Vera?" he asked.

He felt a quiver go through her hand and arm, and looked up into her face again.

"Well?" he queried.

Vera sighed. "You know I love you, dear boy. Isn't that enough for now?"

Lee sat up quickly. "But if you do love me, why is it you won't promise to marry me?"

She closed her eyes and made no reply. A faint, unconvincing smile came into her face. When she opened her eyes a moment later, Lee fancied a peculiar wetness in them.

"There are some things I can't explain," she made cryptic response—and all at once Lee felt years younger than she. "You know I love you, and always will. There's nobody else."

"But——"

She checked him. "Of course, if it will make you any happier for me to promise——"

"Any happier!" He caught her in his arms. "Why, if you didn't promise, I declare I'd give right up—not even start for Detroit."

Vera threw him a tenderly appraising glance. She could never help feeling the slightest bit maternal toward this strange rare lover of hers—with his high forehead and straw-colored, wispy hair; his diffident grey eyes; and most noteworthy of all, his sensitive, whimsical, talented mouth. She loved him—that was certain enough; yet he puzzled her. Sometimes he said unintelligible things. Unassertiveness was almost a weakness in him; he had no faculty for pushing himself forward. A most lovable visionary.

"You're funny," she said.

But Lee's high spirits had entirely returned.

"We won't have to wait long, my dearest. Once I get to the city, there won't be any holding me. In less than a year's time——"

Vera looked skeptical. "I surely hope so, but you mustn't expect too much in the beginning."

His introspective eyes lighted up, and he leaned forward eagerly.

"I mean it, Vera—every word of it. There won't be any holding me. There's nothing to success but hard work; and with you to work for—knowing that every minute I waste means waiting for you just that much longer—why, no power on earth can keep me from being successful."

"It does sound simple," admitted Vera.

"The simplest thing in the world. Life itself is simple. There's just one rule: Success comes to the man who works for it—the man who deserves it. A man can get anything he wants in life—provided he wants it hard enough."

"Just what is it you're going to try for?" Vera interposed. "Money?"

Lee looked a little bewildered by this demand for definite information. "Money? Yes, I want to make money first of all, so that I can marry you. But I want to count for something in the world, besides."

"I've thought at times," Vera reverted, "that you'd never make much money."

Lee laughed confidently. "Oh, I'll make enough, I guess." Then his enthusiasm re-possessed him. "I can hardly wait to get to the city. Think of it!—thousands of people on the streets—skyscrapers—every chance in the world to make good! It's the Big Adventure!"

Some remnant of Vera's dubiousness flickered. "It doesn't do to be too much of an idealist."

He was conscious of a great, charitable wisdom. "Ideals, dear, are what make the world go round. If a man trusts people—looks for the very best in them—he won't be disappointed."

For a time they were silent, both of them again a little depressed at the thought of parting. The sun had set behind the low hills to the left, and already the first pre-

monition of twilight crept up the eastern sky. From the town two miles north came the sound of church-bells, melancholy and mellow. There were two bells, one in the Congregational church, the other in the Methodist. They alternated with each other, as if in friendly rivalry.

Vera smiled. "I begged off from the Young People's Meeting to-night. I told mother this was your last night."

Presently he moved closer. Answering the appeal in his eyes, she slowly bent down to his lips. They kissed each other softly, tenderly, almost reverently.

"Keep your arms around me," Vera whispered tensely. "Never let me go! Never—no matter what I say or do!"

"My wonderful sweetheart!" he said.

It seemed to him that she held him more tightly than ever before; bound him to her with a fierce urgency, as if she were afraid of losing him, as if she were fighting for him.

II

IT was after eight o'clock and quite dark when Vera and Lee finally reached the outskirts of the village of Chatham. Ever more slowly, they crossed Main Street, with its two blocks of store-fronts and well-gnawed hitching rails; cut "kitty corner" down across the square, past the courthouse and the jail, and approached the massive old-fashioned brick house where the Wakefields lived.

All at once they caught sight of a horse and trim phaëton standing in the road opposite the house.

Vera gave an impatient exclamation: "Oh bother!"

Lee recognised the rig as belonging to a youth named Milo Higginson, who had lately developed an obvious interest in Vera. Lee knew young Higginson slightly, and considered him a sullen and unprepossessing lout. Milo's father, however, owned the Higginson State Bank in the nearby town of Record, and was the most important financial figure in the county. Milo basked in reflected glory. He wore tailor-made clothes and had more money to spend than any three Chatham swains.

But Vera looked disconsolate. "I'm terribly sorry," she professed.

Lee's perfect happiness prompted quick magnanimity. It did not even occur to him to think of Milo Higginson as a rival.

"That's all right," he hastened. "I understand how it is."

"You know mother," sighed Vera.

Lee nodded. Mrs. Wakefield completely dominated her

daughter—and even her husband, the placid phlegmatic Chatham druggist, Roscoe Wakefield.

"It's all right, Vera," he repeated. "What's more, don't think I expect you to stay alone every night this winter. I'd much rather have you go out and enjoy yourself."

By this time, they had reached the Wakefield house. Peering toward the wide front porch, Lee descried the figure of a man and woman.

"Veral" called out Mrs. Wakefield's voice sharply.

"Yes, mother." Vera turned impulsively to Lee. "You're the only one I love—the only one I will ever love."

Lee's ecstasy reached its apogee. "I trust you implicitly, dear," he said, then turned away quickly.

Three minutes later he was home.

The Hillquit house was a nondescript one-story frame structure, well set back from the street. Its unpretentiousness closely reflected the family's economic status. Lee's father, Joseph Hillquit—now dead for more than five years—had come to Chatham shortly after Lee's birth, to establish the "Chatham Republican," a weekly newspaper. Even at the time of his death, when the town had attained the proud population of twenty-five hundred, the "Republican" was only a half-hearted financial success. Lee's earliest memories concerned his father's money worries. In those first years, Hillquit, Sr., had entertained vast hopes, not only of material prosperity, but also of prominence and political influence. He was a man with a natural predisposition toward pessimism, and as it gradually came home to him that his high ambitions were never to be realised—when he found himself doomed to the mediocrity of a village editorship—he became a misanthrope outright.

A family is a closely-knit unit; the effect of one member's mood is incalculable—especially the mood of the family's dominant head. Joseph Hillquit unwittingly vented his bitterness of soul, his grudge against the world, upon his

wife and adolescent son. He scoffed and sneered the light-heartedness out of them. It was as if they were all living in an unventilated room of poisonous, over-heated air. Mrs. Hillquit took refuge in silence and apparent acquiescence, and young Lee in time found it less frictional to suppress his youthful exuberance and optimism.

Had any one accused him of being anything but a model husband and father, the editor of the "Republican" would have displayed indignant resentment. In all outward forms, indeed, he fulfilled his family obligations. He fed, clothed and housed his dependents at the cost of long, confining hours and extreme fatigue. He was faithful to his wife; he never raised a hand against his boy. For fifteen years, moreover, he somehow kept up the premiums on a life insurance policy, which now paid his widow an annuity of a thousand dollars.

That was the pathos of his life. He "did his duty" by his family, and never once suspected that he was inflicting a subtle, insidious wrong upon them. When he died, his wife and eighteen-year-old son mourned for him sincerely—and yet they felt, subconsciously, as though a window had been opened in their stifled lives. Mrs. Hillquit, just past forty, never quite escaped her settled attitude of subdued and worried submissiveness. Her eyes seldom lost their expression of slight apprehensiveness. She had become irrevocably negative. But youth is buoyant, resilient; and young Lee, then in his senior year at high school, came to the surface like a drowning animal that has at last freed itself of the stone tied to its neck. He became articulate, self-expressive. Acting from some wise instinct, his mother abetted the transformation. With the proceeds from the sale of the "Republican" she sent him to the University. No Chatham limitations for her son, even though it meant self-denial and four years of loneliness for her! And her reward was that Lee Hillquit, just graduated, his old scars almost van-

ished, had become as self-confident and idealistic, albeit unsophisticated, a youth as ever restlessly awaited his cue in the wings of Life's big stage.

Lee found the house deserted and dark, save for the swinging kerosene lamp that burned low in the dining-room. His mother was at the Methodist church, he knew. He proceeded directly to his little room in one of the rear corners of the house, and began to pack his trunk. His train left early the next morning, and he planned to complete all preparations that night.

Presently he came upon an old, cloth-bound book, which bore the title, "Fisk's Encyclopedia." The book opened automatically to a certain well-fingered page. At the top were the words: "The Two Paths." First came the picture of a boy of twenty. Underneath were three other engravings, depicting him at the ages of thirty, forty, and fifty. Each picture revealed him less clear-eyed, less prepossessing, until at fifty he was the embodiment of dissipation, poverty and disgrace. The opposite page represented a second boy, at the same ages, growing clearer-eyed, more virtuous-looking and distinguished with each picture—till at fifty he epitomised self-respect, wisdom and at least moderate wealth. Each picture bore a graphic description of the causes of the change in the two characters. The first boy drank, dissipated, loafed and neglected his duty. The second boy spurned temptations, worked faithfully and always did his duty. Lee never had forgotten the thrill of good resolution that ran through him when he first came across these pictures. There was something convincing in the illustrations and in the inexorableness of the warning words. The moral penetrated deep; the pictures became a symbol to him. This was when he was sixteen. He took the book to college with him, and at times secretly reread the passages. Even now, they represented something fundamental in his life. They simplified things so. Lee felt the same thrill of good

resolution go through him to-night, as he placed the old book in the top of his trunk.

Just then he heard the side screen-door open, and in a moment his mother appeared in the doorway.

Sara Hillquit was a woman of forty-five, of medium height, her spare figure clad in an inconspicuous black dress. She was a native Vermonter, and possessed the characteristic New England faculty of defying old age. She looked as if she were under forty, and one had the feeling that at sixty she would look forty-five. Her cheeks bore the remnants of frosty redness. There was not a grey hair in her head. She had the New Englander's sharpness of feature, and the New Englander's predilection toward preciseness, too; she minced her words a little; and of course, she clipped her r's and flattened her a's. Of late, she had worn gold-rimmed spectacles, which somehow made her seem a little unfamiliar to her son. About her still hung—and always would—the atmosphere of depressed goodness, the heritage of her late husband's moodiness.

Lee kissed his mother. He loved her very deeply—especially her occasional revelations of tenderness. At times he appreciated her self-sacrifices for him, too—though he had acquired the prevalent American habit of belittling and discounting all help given him.

Mrs. Hillquit was not a demonstrative mother. "All packed?" she began, and removed her small black hat.

"Every last thing," her son replied.

"D' you s'pose you can find room for one more small parcel?" she queried mysteriously.

Lee smiled. "What is it?"

His mother disappeared, and he heard her go into her room, adjoining his. Presently, she reappeared, carrying a bundle, wrapped in newspapers. "There," she said, and gave it to him.

Lee received the parcel with pretended gravity, and fin-

gered it curiously. "What on earth——" he demanded, then started to unwrap the newspaper covering.

His mother seized his hands. "No, not now!" she enjoined. "Wait till you're in Detroit."

Lee packed the bundle carefully in one corner of the trunk. "It's so soft," he commented. He took his mother in his arms again, and kissed her. He was greatly surprised to feel her body tremble. Then he saw two or three tears slip down her cheek.

"It's nothing," she said, and smiled. "I ought to be ashamed of myself."

Lee patted her thin shoulder.

"I'm so anxious to have my boy go right," she explained as she wiped her eyes.

"Don't worry about that, mother." Lee almost smiled. "I know the difference between right and wrong, and I know how to succeed. I'm determined I'll make good, and I'm going to work hard. So nothing can possibly keep me back."

"But you don't even know what you're going to do," insisted Mrs. Hillquit. "You don't understand a thing about earning money, and you have no influence——"

"Don't need it, mother. I'm going to make good on my own merits. Just you wait."

Mrs. Hillquit shook her head. "I'll visit you, maybe—but I couldn't be contented in Detroit. It wouldn't seem natural—and all my friends are here."

"Perhaps you'll change your mind later," said Lee.

His mother's thoughts gravitated back to the practical. "What time do you want to be called in the morning?" She went to bed at nine every evening, and was up at five.

Mother and son discussed various details a moment. When Mrs. Hillquit kissed him good-night, she was again her natural, suppressed, matter-of-fact, New England self.

"Be sure you get a room with plenty of heat," were her parting words.

III

THE Chatham "hack" called for Lee promptly at eight o'clock the next morning; he kissed his mother a final good-bye; Rex, the undersized, shrivelled hack-driver, who had never missed a train, swung his trunk up on the front seat; and he was on his way at last. The air was unexpectedly cold, and he buttoned his light cravatte tightly about him.

As he passed the Wakefield house, he looked in vain for some sign of Vera. She had promised to watch for the hack. Just as he had given up hope, she ran out on the porch and waved her handkerchief. A sweep of emotion overcame him; he gulped; his eyes felt queer. He leaned out of the rear seat and waved his hat; and until Rex turned the corner two blocks down, he kept his eye on the fluttering white handkerchief on the porch.

Then he turned to Rex and simulated an interest in the two mares that drew the hack. But within, he still felt the same surging emotion—a sort of sad nobleness, a determination to be good and achieve an astounding success.

Rex picked up another passenger—Lee was relieved that it was a stranger—and the hack quickly covered the half-mile to the depot. The train was reported ten minutes late, but presently the diminutive locomotive came coughing and steaming through the frosty air. Lee found a seat in the antiquated chair-car; the train jerked, gathered speed; the drab, wooden Chatham depot slipped from view. Lee saw Rex starting phlegmatically on his return trip; caught a last glimpse of the distant village, looking very neat and self-sufficient in the morning sunshine.

"At last!" he sighed.

His heroic, all-conquering mood persisted. It was quite true, as his mother had said, that he was entirely without definite plans—equally without influence or capital. Had he known it, his ignorance of the practical aspects of life was incredible. He entertained a rather hazy intention of entering some business where energy and brains would yield quick returns.

"I'm honest and ambitious, and I have a good education," he told himself once more. "I'll find something. They can't keep me down."

On second thought, he did have one definite purpose. A former friend of his father, P. H. Taladay, had gone to the city some fifteen years before. His career in Chatham had not been noteworthy; yet within a few years, he owned two vaudeville theatres in Detroit and was reported to be rich. Now he was reckoned a millionaire, and his occasional visits to Chatham were the village's most important events.

On one of these trips Joseph Hillquit had introduced his son to the great man.

"Comin' to Detroit, eh?" Taladay had said. "Well, the city's the place for opportunities. Mebbe I might turn something your way, my boy."

Lee had been greatly impressed by the magnate's breezy, patronising good nature. He had resolved to look Mr. Taladay up, if eventually he did go to Detroit.

He had two other friends in the city. Both of them had been classmates of his at the University. Bob Hamilton had been the editor of the college newspaper, and had "caught on"—so he wrote Lee—with the Detroit newspaper for which he had been the University correspondent. He and Lee had been close friends. There were certain things about Bob that Lee didn't wholly like—chiefly a certain suggestion of weakness; but he had been very glad to accept his friend's suggestion about sharing rooms in Detroit.

Fred Badger, the other friend, was of a quite different mould. Secretly, Lee hoped for delightful things from this friendship. Fred had belonged to one of the best fraternities in college, and Lee understood that he was "well connected" in Detroit. In fact, Lee had seen Fred's name twice that very summer in the society columns of the "Detroit News." Fred's friendship for Lee had been purely accidental: both of them played the guitar; they had sat next each other on the back row of the Mandolin Club for three years. In their junior year, they had suddenly become excellent friends. Lee did not feel the same intimacy and congeniality toward Fred that he cherished for Bob Hamilton; but Fred suggested strength where Bob suggested weakness.

The Lake Shore train arrived in Ypsilanti nearly an hour late, so that Lee missed connection with the East-bound Michigan Central train that was to take him to Detroit. It was nearly three when he caught "The Wolverine."

The train was scheduled to make the trip from Ypsilanti to Detroit in forty minutes. It seemed to Lee that he had hardly settled himself in the crowded Pullman smoking compartment when the outskirts of the city began to crowd up about the flying train.

In September, 1907, the city of Detroit had hardly begun to stir from its long habit of quiet sleepiness, was just becoming conscious of the innate, quickening power of miraculous growth. The city was increasingly prosperous—had hardly felt the hard times of 1907. In seven years the population had jumped from 280,000 to more than 400,000. The older, more conservative element, in fact, opposed this sudden growth. "Detroit has always been such a nice place to live in," they complained. "We'd rather it stayed small, instead of getting big and smoky and dirty."

Everywhere one encountered this subtle antagonism between the old and conservative faction and the new, hus-

ting invasion of commercialism. The automobile industry, still in its swaddling clothes, clamored loudly, and for the most part vainly, at the banks for credit. "It's just a passing fad," asseverated Griswold street. "Remember the bicycle." The stove, the pharmaceutical product, the seed, were still regarded as the city's commercial backbone. The local chauvinists still boasted: "More boats pass by Detroit than any other port in the world;" and never once perceived the irony of their words.

But the newer, younger element, coming in from outside the city, was perceptibly gaining ground. Even in those days, Henry Ford was beginning to be a name to conjure with, to stir the imagination. "The automobile business is here to stay," vaunted these optimists. Any industry that gave employment to ten thousand skilled mechanics, that had an output worth twenty million dollars, was more than a fanatic's dream, more than a fad. "If Detroit doesn't wake up and boost—instead of knocking," they warned, "we'll find some other city." And Detroit capital still wavered between caution and the lure of adventure.

Into the thick of this sprawling and renascent city, "The Wolverine" threaded its way with slackening momentum. The railroad entrance to any city is depressingly sordid. Lee found no thrill in the shabby rows of sooty cottages, the occasional dingy brick factories, the lofty skeleton-steel electric-light towers.

"Detroit!" vociferated the brakeman. "This car goes through to St. Thomas, Buffalo and New York."

The Michigan Central Railroad was still using its Third street depot. Lee walked into the old, ivy-covered building with a sense of mingled elation and awe. He delivered his baggage check to an expressman, resisted the ingratiating attempts of the porter to take his suitcase, and stepped out on the sidewalk.

So this was Detroit! Lee had been in the city only

twice in his life, on flying trips with the University musical clubs. He looked about him with lively curiosity. Certainly the immediate vicinity of the station was far from prepossessing. Three saloons and two quick-lunch rooms met his inquiring scrutiny. But Lee instinctively banished all misgivings. His ideals of the city surged into his mind. Here lay opportunity, success—and somewhere, he was sure, even beauty.

His interested eye paused upon a knot of men gathered compactly about a little niche in the depot wall. No street-car was in sight, and he sauntered toward the group. The men seemed to be looking over each other's shoulders at something on the ground. Lee was above the average height, and by dint of standing on his tip-toes and craning his neck, was presently able to see an unusual spectacle.

The niche in the depot wall left a little plot of grass, protected by an iron fence. Within the enclosure two sparrows were fighting. The struggle must have been prolonged; its conclusion was obviously near at hand. Both birds had been blinded. One of them had seized the other by the neck, and was weakly shaking it. The second sparrow broke loose and feebly attacked its assailant. Both made futile attempts to fly.

Lee felt a sudden hotness at the cruelty of it. He looked at the faces about him. Nearly all of them reflected high gratification. Slack mouths expanded into foolish grins. Dull eyes glistened. The observers gloated over the rare entertainment. One or two of the faces remained soddently inexpressive. Lee looked at the clothes of these men. Most of them were prosperously dressed.

The youthful idealist from the country turned away. Cruelty toward animals always sickened him. He had a notion that he ought to do something to terminate this brutal display—charge in among these men, perhaps, disperse them with a stinging rebuke, and mercifully kill the

tormented birds. Then the futility of doing anything at all came over him.

A Woodward avenue street-car backed around the corner, and Lee prepared to board it. A number of people had been waiting for the car, and each of them now seemed imbued with a desire to crowd his way into the car in advance of his neighbors. Those who first achieved the interior of the car apparently felt that theirs was a commendable accomplishment. Every one seemed irritated at everybody else. Everybody looked tired.

At the corner of Jefferson avenue and Griswold street, Lee had his first thrill. The Union Trust and Hammond buildings came into view on the east side of Griswold street—then, on the west side, the snow-white outlines of the new Ford building, nineteen stories high, almost completed, the first of a future series of terra-cotta skyscrapers.

Lee's spirits rebounded. Here at last was the real city, real opportunity—yes, even real beauty. That ugliness back there—that brutality, that discourtesy—they were incidental, unusual.

At Woodward avenue, the car turned north. Lee noted the buildings, the crowds of people on the street, the width of the avenue itself. He was duly impressed by the magnitude of the new Hotel Pontchartrain, then in course of construction. At Bagg street, he got off the car, walked two blocks west, and by following Bob Hamilton's explicit directions, readily found the house on Cass avenue where Bob was already occupying rooms.

A middle-aged woman, with grey hair and curling-iron bangs, answered his ring.

"You're Mr. Hilton," she assured Lee, before he could introduce himself. "The young man who's going to room with Mr. Hamilton."

"Hillquit," corrected Lee.

"Come right in," she invited.

Lee followed Mrs. Holmes' calico kimono up a flight of dark stairs.

"Here they are," she announced, and threw open a door.

Lee found two rooms, one a small living room, the other an alcove bedroom, hidden by a velvet curtain. They were side rooms, not luxuriously furnished; but the living room, at least, was well lighted. Lee noted with a glow of recognition that Bob Hamilton had already decorated the walls with various University insignia.

Mrs. Holmes warned him against using tacks in the walls, assured him that she wanted only respectable men in her rooming house and that no scandal had ever come near the institution; then departed.

It was already after four o'clock. Lee sat down in one of the rocking chairs and looked about the rooms more particularly. With very little trouble, he decided, they could be made very like college quarters. He was conscious of steam heat in the room—the day had remained cold—and he reflected that his mother would approve of this feature.

All at once he bethought himself of the mysterious package his mother had given him the night before. Slowly he unwrapped the newspaper covering. A fruit cake, with heavy chocolate frosting—a particular weakness of Lee's—came into view.

As he stood looking at the cake, he suddenly felt the qualms of a great homesickness, a devastating loneliness. A picture of his mother, weeping a few silent tears, came poignantly to him.

"What rubbish!" he said out loud, and resolutely began unpacking.

At five, Bob Hamilton appeared.

"Why, hello, Leel!" he grinned.

Lee returned his roommate's greeting with unrestrained fervor. Bob was a rather short, rotund youth, with a round

colorless face and slightly protruding blue eyes behind journalistic, steel-rimmed spectacles. His small mouth was indubitably weak. His lower lip had a tendency to quiver. He was thoroughly sincere, both in manner and in speech; but he lacked the solid alloy of self-respect; he seemed to find spiritual gratification in humbleness, in abasing himself.

"You're thinner," pronounced Lee. "You look fagged."

Bob threw his overcoat on the bed and sat down. "Been trotting my legs off all summer," he explained. "I'm doing suburban on the paper, you know. What have you been up to?"

Lee went into details—without mentioning Vera, however. His love for her seemed too sacred, too fine, to retail to any one just yet. And Bob, he knew, had the feminine inability to keep a confidence.

"And now you're here," said Bob, "what plans have you, anyway?"

Lee chose to be evasive. "I have two or three things up my sleeve—several people I want to talk with. I'm going to look the field over pretty carefully before I decide. There's a lot more chance for a new man in some lines than in others."

"I s'pose so," agreed Bob. "I spoke to MacLennan, the city editor, about you yesterday, and he said there was nothing doing at present."

"Thanks, anyway. Probably just as well. I don't think I'd make much of a reporter, anyway. I'm going to take my time, and pick out a job where hard work'll bring a real success."

"I guess you'll find what you want sooner or later," Bob concurred, as he looked at his watch. "Six o'clock! Come on—I'll show you our boarding house."

IV

IN spite of his pose of easy assurance before his roommate, Lee really felt a great deal of restlessness and some uncertainty about his choice of work. His mother had volunteered to lend him ten dollars a week until he secured suitable employment; but she could ill afford to send him money, and he felt considerable distaste toward accepting her remittances. Besides, he was eager, ambitious, determined to win splendid success in an unprecedentedly short time. He wondered if he would be making enough money in six months to marry Vera.

Tuesday morning he finished unpacking his trunk, then walked downtown. He first planned to have a long intimate talk with his father's friend, P. H. Taladay. Possibly, if the magnate offered any definitely attractive prospect, Lee might enter the theatrical business.

He found the desired address in the directory—the Grand Theatre building, in the vicinity of Grand Circus Park. Eventually he made his way to the theatre, took an elevator to the second floor and entered Mr. Taladay's office.

A sallow, dyspeptic young Jew condescended to look up from the roll-top desk behind which he was working.

"Is Mr. Taladay in?"

The young man on the other side of the desk looked thoroughly disgusted. He resumed his work.

Lee was completely perplexed—started to be indignant.

"*Never* in, mornings—maybe after lunch," the young Jew snapped without looking up.

"I'll come in again this afternoon," Lee proclaimed.

No response.

Lee left the office, feeling angry and somehow humiliated. What had he done to antagonise the man at the desk?

His boarding house confined its activities to breakfast and dinner; and he bought an egg sandwich and a glass of milk at a downtown serve-self. For some time he sauntered about the streets, looking in the shop windows, watching the intent, tired-looking faces of the people. How dreary, how disillusioned most of them seemed! It was as if they were all warning him: "Don't you dare impose on me!" Lee walked for an hour without seeing any one really smile. He wished from the bottom of his heart that he could see one familiar face.

He caught himself up sharply. The unfriendliness, the indifference, the strangeness of it were getting beneath his skin. He shook off his depression. "It's just because I'm lonesome," he explained to himself.

At half-past two, he re-entered Mr. Taladay's outer office. At his inquiry, the young man behind the desk looked more bored than ever and merely shook his head.

"What time do you expect him?"

The young misanthrope shrugged his shoulders—lifted his upper lip superciliously. Suddenly he looked up.

"What d' y' want t' see him about?" he demanded with obvious suspicion.

Lee was confused. "Why—personal business."

The young Jew looked very skeptical, started to say something, changed his mind, looked down at his work again.

Lee glanced around the room uncertainly, saw a vacant chair near the door and decided to sit down.

The minutes dragged on. Every time any one came in the office, Lee's heart jumped expectantly. But Mr. Taladay did not appear. Lee felt ill at ease. At intervals, the weary young Jew would throw him a malevolent look. Two jaunty stenographers appeared from the inner offices from time to time, and stared at him curiously.

At four o'clock, Lee again approached the desk. He was still determined to be polite.

"I guess Mr. Taladay isn't going to show up," he began.

The dyspeptic face did not change its expression. "Been gone fifteen minutes."

"Been gone!" Lee stared. He leaned over the top of the desk. Anger bowled aside his self-restraint. "Why didn't you let him know I was here?" he shouted.

The young Jew eyed Lee without emotion. He laid his pen down. "Look here!" he suddenly shot out. "I'm paid to keep insurance agents and other pests like you out of Mr. Taladay's office. You can wait here every afternoon for a year, and you'll never lay eyes on him."

"Pest!" It was hard to keep from sputtering. "I want you to know I'm a friend of Mr. Taladay, and I intend to see him and tell him all about your damned impudence. It's a funny thing if——" He had to stop abruptly to gulp.

The bright shrewd little eyes opposite betrayed a flicker of interest. "Oh, a friend!" he observed with sarcastic respect. He appraised Lee more carefully. After all, the intruder might not be an insurance agent. "Well, if you would have been a friend of Mr. Taladay's, you wouldn't have been so tight about tellin' me your business with him. Mr. Taladay's friends ain't afraid t' give me their cards."

Lee was perplexed by this counter charge, but he was also very much aroused. "I'll be back here to-morrow afternoon, and I'll see Mr. Taladay in spite of you."

The young Jew unfanged once more in high disdain, and resumed his work as if to end the colloquy.

Lee walked home. He wished he could be righteously indignant without forfeiting his self-possession. It was so ridiculous to have to sputter incoherently and gulp. Well, he would see Mr. Taladay to-morrow—he was determined on that point—and the big man would straighten things out.

He was disappointed not to find a letter from Vera waiting for him at the rooms. She had promised to write him Monday. Not even a letter from his mother. He set to work arranging his things about the rooms. That night, he wrote a long, affectionate letter to Vera, purposely optimistic. By the time he had mailed it and gone to bed, he was thoroughly happy once more.

The next morning was grey and misty, and he left the house late. The indefiniteness of his plans bewildered him. Perhaps it would be just as well to accept some employment with Mr. Taladay for the present, till he had a chance to get his bearings.

The mist developed into a rain as he walked down Woodward avenue. At the Majestic building he gave a sudden shout of recognition.

"Oh, Fred!" he called.

The energetic young man in the grey rain-coat who had been hurrying in the opposite direction, pulled up short. A grin of recognition overspread his sharply-cut features. He grasped Lee's hand warmly.

"Hello, old top!" he greeted.

Fred Badger was the embodiment of self-confident, prosperous efficiency. It was not only the "snap" to his suit, the flamboyancy of his striped four-in-hand tie. He looked you right in the eye. He had a certain kind of force, a certain definiteness. Somehow he persuaded you not only that he knew precisely what he wanted, but also that he would usually get it. His features were regular—except that his nose was a little flat. His dark brown eyes were very alert under full, accented brows. Here was practical ability, one felt—power to achieve, purposefulness—and possibly, selfishness and total lack of sensitiveness. Here was no dreamer, but a doer, the type of youth of whom older men say: "There's a boy who's going to succeed in life."

Lee felt his loneliness slip from him. "Lordy, it's good to see you!" he jubilated. "I've been here two days already, and you're the first person I've met on the streets that I knew. What are you doing?"

Fred explained that he had recently become a bond salesman, "with the best bond house in Detroit," he added. "I get \$75.00 a month salary, and a commission, to start with. Believe me, Lee, I'm going to make two thousand dollars my first year at it. How about yourself?"

Lee set forth his plans as optimistically as he could; but all the time, he was conscious of Fred Badger's keen, appraising eye. "I might try the bond business," he intimated.

Fred waved a greeting at two other young men. "I doubt if you'd find any good opening," he answered. "I only landed this job because I had a drag—and you don't know anybody. A bond broker's got to have lots of friends, to start with. Why don't you try real estate or insurance?"

"I don't think I'd like insurance," professed Lee. He was thinking of what the young Jew in Mr. Taladay's office had said: "Insurance agents and other pests." He thought the business must be disagreeable.

"Well, you'll find something," said Fred, looking critically at Lee. "I must be getting on."

"But, Fred, I want to talk to you," objected Lee. "Can't we have lunch together?"

"Hello, Chuck," called Fred to another friendly youth. "Lunch? Sorry, but I'm dated up. Call me up sometime—or better yet, give me your 'phone number." He jotted down the number. "See you soon." He smiled gaily, and hurried away.

Lee was disappointed. He had wanted to get "pointers" on possible business openings. Somehow, Fred seemed so airy, so casual, about seeing him again. But he swallowed

his disappointment. Fred and he would surely be just as good friends as ever.

Lee consumed another egg sandwich, and promptly at two o'clock walked into Mr. Taladay's office for the third time. He produced one of his personal cards, wrote on it, "From Chatham," and handed it to the young Jew. The latter scrutinised the card, then with great dignity disappeared into the inner offices.

After a long absence, he reappeared, and with a distinctly injured manner, informed Lee he might see Mr. Taladay.

Mr. P. H. Taladay had changed but little in seven years—in fact, he still looked the guileless country man. He was a large, shapeless individual, with a chubby florid face and a pompadour of white hair. His light blue eyes were deceptively ingenuous; his mouth inclined to pout—in fact, his whole expression inevitably reminded one of a baby's. He talked incessantly about himself and his success, which, indeed, had been remarkable. Twenty years before, when he first came to Detroit, he had been practically penniless. Now he was worth four or five million dollars. He controlled a string of vaudeville theatres. He even produced plays. Besides his theatrical holdings, he owned large blocks of stock in the city's most substantial industries. Everything he touched "turned to gold," it was whispered. He was a director in two banks; a vice president in one. Under cover of his unsophisticated expression, he had a mind that was like a steel trap, a definite, hard, purposefulness that never wavered, a selfishness that never softened.

At Lee's entrance into the private office, Taladay promptly pivoted about in his desk chair.

"Well, young man?" His little blue eyes took in his caller instantly.

"I don't suppose you remember me," Lee began deprecatingly. "My father introduced——"

"Oh yes!" broke in Taladay. "You're Joe Hillquit's son. Sit down. How's your father?"

"Why, he's been dead five years," faltered Lee.

"That's so—I remember hearing about it. And what can I do for you?"

His embarrassed visitor reminded him of his offer of help. All of the time Taladay was taking Lee's measure and finding him woefully wanting. He had an instinctive aversion to college men. He wouldn't hire one on a bet, he told himself. They had too many fool scruples.

"Well, I don't know of any opening right now," he answered promptly. Then his excellent opinion of himself intervened. "But you ought to find something. Why, when I came here in 1887, they wasn't one-quarter the chance for a boy they is now. I didn't have a cent to start with, an' look at me to-day. Shows what hard work and brains will do for a man."

"I thought perhaps you might let me work in the box office," Lee timidly interposed.

It occurred to Taladay that he was wasting time. He stood up. "No vacancy right now. Besides, it's long hours an' only ten dollars a week. You'll find something much better, I'm sure." He moved a step toward the door.

"But if you hear of something—couldn't you let me know? I'll leave my card."

"Sure I will," acquiesced the great man. He had no objection to granting favors that required neither time nor money.

After Lee had gone, Taladay shook his head. The young cub had more than usual to learn, he thought, as he tore Lee's card in two and threw it into his wastebasket.

On the street outside, Lee was doing his best to keep his face impassive. He felt a dread of any one suspecting his disappointment. He had hoped to secure news of several

possible opportunities, had counted on being offered some sort of a position in Mr. Taladay's employment.

All at once, he stopped short. In spite of himself, he smiled. He had completely forgotten to tell Mr. Taladay about the young Jew's insolence.

What to do next? Lee walked on irresolutely. He came to a little triangular park and cut through it. Every bench had at least one occupant, ragged, unkempt, huddled shivering into as small space as possible.

One bench-warmer descried Lee's philanthropic mien from afar, and drew up to him from the rear.

"Say, brother, could you help a fellow out wit' the price of a meal? I ain't had——"

Lee stopped and looked around. When his interlocutor had caught one glimpse of his open, trustful expression, he forthwith decided to play for higher stakes.

"I got a job waitin' f'r me out at the Cadillac, but all my tools 're in hock f'r a dollar. I ain't no bum." This last vehemently.

"Of course not!" Lee considered the problem conscientiously. He couldn't possibly afford a dollar.

The "bo" divined Lee's mental process instantly. "I got a half dollar already," he explained. "All I need's another half—to git my tools out-a hock. I'm a skilled mechanic, I am."

Lee took note of the man's large-pupilled, bloodshot eyes—the shred of "fine-cut" clinging to his lower lip—and had an instant's misgivings.

"I jus' want t' borrow a half dollar," set forth the bench-warmer. "You give me your address, and I'll bring the money to you the first pay I draw. I swear I will, so help me God!"

The man was almost in tears. Lee produced the half dollar, then wrote his address on a card. The man shuffled off with voluble protestations of maudlin gratitude.

"Thank heaven!" reflected Lee, "I don't have to worry about actual poverty, anyway."

He walked home. To his great delight, he found a letter from Vera. To Lee that letter was quite the most remarkable document in the world. He reread it a half-dozen times. She made him ashamed for feeling even slightly despondent. All his hopes and ambitions vaulted into the saddle once more. Nothing should stop him! He would overcome every obstacle! These first discouragements—every successful man had them at the outset.

He was evasively optimistic with Bob Hamilton again that night—quite to the latter's envy.

"There's something unusual about you," Bob insisted. "You're different. You'll do something extraordinary. I'll bet you'll never chase your legs off for twelve dollars a week, the way I'm doing."

Lee felt mysteriously elated. To-morrow would bring something momentous, he was very sure.

V

LEE set out at half-past eight Thursday morning; not that he had arrived at any definite plan, but because he imagined that Mrs. Holmes would begin to think peculiar things about him if he continued to spend most of his time in the rooms. On the way downtown, he set himself to the task of facing the dilemma intelligently, logically—the way a college man should. He believed that pure reason could solve any problem in life.

The day was again inclement. An uneasy southwest wind blew the rain in his face. He continued to tramp the streets aimlessly for two hours. Somehow his mental processes didn't seem to be functioning efficiently. How did one get a job, anyway? It was the first time in his life he had had to face a problem in practical economics. Should he make a round of the downtown stores or offices—or what? What did other college men do? Slowly his elation was oozing away.

He happened to go past the old, red-brick library. Perhaps there might be some book on the subject. The idea was a pleasant one. He entered the building by the rear door, and walked up the stairs. At the periodical room, he wavered. In the racks, he spied the current number of his favorite magazine. The temptation was too great; Lee took the magazine and settled down in a seat by the window. After all, he couldn't be expected to walk the streets and cudgel his brain all day.

That afternoon found Lee in the library again, and the next morning, as well. Little by little the building was beginning to represent a refuge from the unpleasantness of

uncertainty and indecision. To be sure, he did find a number of ponderous volumes dealing with the "problem of employment"; but they all confined themselves to the manual workers, the proletariat.

But on Friday afternoon, he accidentally stumbled upon a promising clue. He had finished reading his magazine, and was looking about the room rather idly, vaguely conscious of an uncomfortable feeling of failure. His fellow-readers were mostly an uninspiring lot of seedy derelicts. Some of them frequented the library solely because it was well-heated.

At Lee's right, a man was reading the daily paper. Lee looked incuriously at the pages. The man seemed to be studying the "liner" advertisements.

All at once, the idea came to Lee. How simple! How stupid not to have thought of it before! In these columns, he might find exactly the opportunity he had been craving. Excitedly he secured an evening paper from the desk and returned to the chair.

"A-a-a-a," he read—"wanted, young men to act as insurance agents. New proposition. Ideal opportunity."

That sounded promising, Lee reflected; but the prejudice of the young Jew in Taladay's office against insurance agents had corroded deeply into his sensibilities. He didn't want to be classed as a "pest," no matter how much money he made.

Several advertisements for mechanics followed—then:

"A—Young man wanted at once to enter real estate business. No previous experience necessary, but only hustler need apply. Splendid opening for an ambitious, industrious man. Apply Sales Manager, Security Realty Company, Adamson building."

Lee read the announcement several times with growing interest. He knew nothing about the real estate business, but he remembered that Fred Badger had suggested it as a

promising possibility. He liked the wording of the advertisement especially. "Only hustler need apply"; "Splendid opening for an ambitious, industrious man": these phrases had the right ring; they brought an instant, enthusiastic response from deep within him.

He looked at his watch. It was nearly four. Probably the place would be gone by now. If only he had looked at the newspaper before. Still, it was worth trying for. Hastily he consulted the city directory; the Adamson building proved to be only two blocks north. He started out briskly. It was hard to keep from running.

He spied a conspicuous sign, just above the second-floor windows of a four-story brick building, bearing in great gilt letters the words: "SECURITY REALTY COMPANY." He sprang up the stairway two steps at a time.

The Security Realty Company occupied the whole second floor of the Adamson building. The room seemed very pretentious to Lee. On the right hand side, as he faced the rear, were various enclosures marked "Cashier," "Book-keeper," etc. At the front, a private office was partitioned off. The opaque glass on the door bore the name: "Mr. Hauxhurst." At the left, fifteen or twenty roll-top desks were marshalled in two rows. The top of each desk bore a small bronze sign with a name printed on it. Very few of the desks were occupied; the whole room seemed deserted.

Just to the right, as he entered the room, Lee's attention centred on a desk standing in a wooden-railed inclosure. This desk also bore a sign: "Mr. O'Neill, Sales Manager"; and thither he directed his rapid steps.

Mr. O'Neill was a thin-faced, smooth-shaven person of thirty, with cautious, filmy eyes, a shrewd, puckered mouth, and a carefully cultivated air of conservatism. He was dictating to a stenographer at the moment. Lee was enormously relieved that no other applicants were at hand.

Mr. O'Neill swung around and surveyed his caller.

"I noticed your advertisement in the newspaper," broached Lee.

"Oh yes," recollected the sales manager. "Come in." He swung open the gate.

Lee sat down hopefully. "Is the place still open?"

O'Neill nodded. "We haven't filled it definitely, as yet." He took a printed slip from a pigeon-hole. "Any experience?"

Lee shook his head.

"Never mind, I didn't have either when I started." The sales manager proceeded to take down other data.

Lee felt that he must impress O'Neill with his earnestness. "I realise that I know nothing of the business," he began, "but I'm ambitious, and I'm willing to work."

O'Neill pursed his lips. His staring grey eyes looked very solemn. "I believe you are, Mr. Hillquit. Let me tell you, there's no such opportunity in the city as you'll get right here."

The youthful applicant broke in excitedly. "You're going to give me the position?"

"Yes," said O'Neill. "I think I'll give you a chance at it, and I really believe you'll make good. Let me show you something."

He extracted a bank book from a drawer. "Understand—I don't show this to everybody. I began with this firm a year ago last spring. I hadn't had any more experience than you. Yet just see what I did." He held the bank book open, and lowered his voice to a reverent whisper: "April 8th, \$50.00—that was the day I closed my first deal—April 20th, \$42.00; April 30th, \$55.00. A hundred and forty-seven dollars my first month. In May, I put two hundred dollars in the bank."

Lee bent over the book. The figures were there. He raised his eyes to O'Neill's thin, nervous face.

"And you can do just as well," he heard the sales manager say.

Two hundred dollars a month! His imagination danced, reeled. He thought of Vera. Here was his opportunity at last!

"When can I start?" he importuned.

"That's the right spirit—I like it," complimented O'Neill unsmilingly. "You can start this afternoon—right away." He consulted a book. "I guess I'll assign you to Mr. Eberenz." He stood up and looked toward the rows of desks at the left. "Let's see—yes, he's in."

He led the way to the fifth desk on the right hand side. "Mr Eberenz—this is Mr. Hillquit, who has just joined our staff. Mr. Eberenz," he told Lee, "is one of our most successful superintendents. He will give you instructions."

Mr. Oscar Eberenz rose from his chair, and grasped Lee's hand cordially. He was about fifty-five years old, bald-headed, grey-haired, inclined to obesity. His eye-glasses gave him a spurious air of refinement. As he smiled his welcome, Lee observed that his left eye-tooth was missing. But his cheerfulness was indubitable. He had been a candy salesman for twenty years, he told Lee; had started in business for himself, and promptly failed; had been in the real estate business but six months. Only five weeks ago, the firm had made him a superintendent. All these desks belonged to superintendents, Mr. Eberenz said. Each superintendent had five or six salesmen under him. Lee was surprised to learn the number of salesmen. There were eighty or ninety, altogether.

Eberenz went on to expound the details of the business. The Security Realty Company specialised in selling subdivision lots. A salesman received five per cent. commission on the price of all lots sold by him. A superintendent, Lee learned afterwards, received a commission of two per cent. on sales made by his men—in addition to the regular five

per cent. commission on his individual sales. The Security Realty Company was paid a ten per cent. commission by the subdivision owners—three per cent. net, after paying its salesmen and superintendents.

Large maps of the half-dozen subdivisions which the company was handling hung on the side wall. As soon as a salesman "closed a deal" for a lot, he reported to his superintendent. The superintendent, in turn, reported each new sale to Mr. O'Neill, the sales manager, and also saw to it that the lot which had been sold was promptly painted red on the wall-map of the plat, indicating that it was off the market. The salesmen were required to report at the office each morning to confer with their respective superintendents, and especially, to check off on their pocket-maps the lots marked sold on the subdivision wall-maps. In this way, each salesman kept an accurate record of just which lots had been sold and which were still on the market.

Eberenz explained that each salesman had "prospects"; that is, prospective purchasers. If he desired, he could have his prospects entered in a book kept for that purpose, and no other salesman would then have a right to sell that particular prospect for three months thereafter. Few salesmen took the trouble to do this, however.

Lee blinked perplexedly. "But how do the salesmen get prospects?"

Eberenz smiled slyly. "That's where us superintendents comes in," he asseverated. "We give you a list of people to call on. The ones that are interested are your prospects. To-morrow, I'll give you a bunch of cards like this." He pointed to a pile of white cards on his desk. "See—they're printed. Here's the name an' address, an' here's places to put down the dates you call on 'em, an' here's 'Remarks.'"

Eberenz gave his new salesman a few more details of information, then said: "Too late t' show you much more

to-day. You be here at nine t'-morrow mornin'. Saturday mornin's we have our experience meetin's," he laughed. "After the meetin', I'll take you out to the subs, an' give you a line on the prop'ty you're goin' to sell."

Lee promised to report promptly the next morning and took his leave. As he approached the door, an anxious-looking man with a drooping moustache entered and approached O'Neill's desk uncertainly. Too late! The poor chap would doubtless be deeply chagrined when he learned that the opening had already been filled.

Lee walked home with a new light in his eyes. Two hundred dollars a month! He wondered what Vera and his mother would say to that. And only two hours ago, he had felt quite beaten. Really, it was almost providential. That night, he wrote Vera all about his good fortune. Bob Hamilton seemed greatly impressed with the possibilities of the real estate business.

The next morning, Eberenz introduced him to a few of his fellow salesmen, and later took him to the meeting. This was held in a nearby hall. The salesmen sat in rows of folding chairs. Lee couldn't help feeling slightly disappointed in their demeanor. Mostly they seemed a sullen, unresponsive lot. They didn't appreciate their splendid opportunity, apparently. Well, so much the easier for him to shine, by comparison.

He was considerably perplexed to note, a few seats to the left, the anxious looking man with the drooping moustache, who had entered the office yesterday just as he was leaving. There must have been two vacancies—or perhaps, they were taking the other man on trial.

To Lee, the salesmen's meeting proved a very inspiring occasion; in fact, the Saturday meetings never quite lost their fascination for him. Mr. Hauxhurst, the principal owner and managing head of the business, presided, and almost always harangued the gathering. Mr. Hauxhurst at

once drew Lee's unadulterated admiration. He was middle-aged; his eyes snapped with energy; when he addressed the meeting, his broad, coarse-skinned face would grow red, and veins would bulge out on both temples. But such eloquence! It always made Lee feel deeply ashamed of his own pusillanimity. Mr. Hauxhurst's speech ordinarily began with a description of how he had closed his first deal with a stubborn customer on a freezing day in mid-winter. "I simply wouldn't let him get away, out of the cold, until I'd sold him." From that beginning, he would proceed to the statement that success in the real estate business was simply a matter of pluck and perseverance. He always concluded by telling his auditors how little of either quality they possessed. "For God's sake, boys, get out and hustle!" was his favorite benediction. Sometimes a superintendent would give a colorless talk; but Hauxhurst's orations were the real feature. Their effect was startling. The salesmen who had slunk crestfallen into the room would walk out determined to sell a whole subdivision next week. Lee, in particular, always felt quite invincible after listening to Hauxhurst.

That first Saturday morning Hauxhurst's theme made an especial appeal to Lee.

"Real estate is more'n just a business," he insisted with convincing earnestness. "A good real estate man makes a lot of money; but he does more'n that. When you sell a man a lot, I tell you you're doin' him the grandest service in the world. First, you're makin' him an investor—makin' him save his money. And he's sure to make a good profit on his investment. Second, you're givin' him a chance t' stop payin' rent and own a home of his own—an' that's the best thing on earth for any man."

What a splendid thought! That was it—the Crusader Spirit. Lee wanted to make money, to be sure; but how fine it was to be serving one's fellow men at the same time!

He imagined himself in the middle of a throng of grateful real estate buyers, a glad smile on his face, an invisible aureole about his head.

The meeting was over at half-past ten, and the eighty salesmen quickly melted away. Eberenz surprised Lee by introducing him to the new man with the drooping moustache. "Mr. Hillquit, meet Mr. Poole." It developed that Poole had also been assigned to Eberenz.

"Now I'll take you two boys out t' see the prop'ty," announced the superintendent, and the three boarded a west-bound Fort street car. On the way out, Lee had some opportunity of getting acquainted with his new fellow-salesman. Poole was nearly forty years old. He was married, he explained, and had two children. He had worked as a shipping clerk in a stove factory for the last ten years, and had recently lost his job because of the combining of two departments. Lee watched him closely, for in a way, Poole represented competition, rivalry. The two of them were starting in at the same time under the same superintendent. The heads of the firm would naturally compare their progress. Poole had a slightly undershot jaw and a thick neck. His eyes were expressionless. He suggested a blind, plaintive doggedness. Lee shut his teeth hard, and made a firm resolve to surpass Poole, at all costs.

He rather liked Eberenz. The superintendent's assumption of gentility was ridiculous, of course. The grand air with which he removed and adjusted his nose-glasses was highly amusing. His smutty stories had no point. But he seemed open and honest, and best of all, unfailingly cheerful. His good nature warmed Lee like a log-fire.

Some three miles out from the city hall, they disembarked and struck out to the north. In a few moments they came to an open space.

Eberenz paused. "Here's 'Westwood,' boys," he pro-

claimed in an awed voice—much as a guide might upon approaching a sacred shrine.

Lee caught his spirit and stood looking at the subdivision reverently. Eberenz led the way through the land, explaining details about the lots, pavements, sewers.

"Here's the first lot I sold," he told them at one point. "The people I closed with are goin' to start buildin' next week. They sure are glad they bought from me."

There it was again—a bit crudely, perchance—the note of splendid service to one's fellow man! Lee looked at Poole—but the new salesman was staring phlegmatically at the vacant lots.

From "Westwood" subdivision, Eberenz conducted his two new disciples by circuitous street-car rides to "Northwood," "Poplar Grove," and finally to "Eastwood."

"You boys don't need t' monkey with those other subs," he directed. "They're mostly sold out. But 'Eastwood's' just on the market—and hardly touched. The lots is low-priced, an' you ought to make your big killin's there."

It was nearly one o'clock when they reached the office again.

"Now you boys can either rest up over Sunday, an' make the big start Monday mornin'—or if you know any prospects, why bring 'em out t' 'Eastwood' to-morrow. I'll be there all day."

The two new salesmen walked up the street together.

"Well, what do you think of it?" sounded Lee.

Poole projected his undershot jaw still farther and rolled his blank eyes, so that he resembled some belligerent species of fish.

"Looks like a fellow could pick up some easy money." He talked slowly and expressed his few ideas with great difficulty.

Money-making—that was all poor old Poole could see

in the real estate business. He caught none of its romance, its tremendous possibilities for unselfish service.

Lee left Poole and repaired to his favorite lunch room. He ate without tasting his sandwich. His eyes flashed. He could hardly keep from button-holing his nearest neighbor at the counter and pouring out the glories of owning a home in "Eastwood"—beautiful "Eastwood."

Completely under the spell of his soaring enthusiasm, he debouched on the street and approached Woodward avenue. Turning south, he mingled with the dense crowd of people that slowly surged up and down the street in the opulent autumn sunshine. Trolley cars clanged, and ground their brakes stridently. Carriages and wagons clattered on the broad asphalt pavement. Occasionally an automobile horn squawked. On all sides people thronged about him closely, intimately, passing him, jostling him. Every few feet of his slow progress a face would fairly start out at him from the human stream going north—then lose itself in the mass. The roar of the street rose and fell in great rhythms, like pulse-beats of gigantic human energy.

The City!

Only yesterday, the loneliness, the sordidness, the ugliness of it had overwhelmed him. The tense, unhappy, thwarted faces on its streets had driven him in on himself. But now, he felt himself its master. He moved in the vast, slow tide of humanity, no longer like jetsam, but with some deep consciousness of power. All these men who had seemed so hostile were his brothers—and he would help them.

Lee Hillquit—the benefactor of the people! He had found a Great Mission in life. Incidentally, he was going to make a great deal of money.

VI

HIS fine mood had somewhat abated the next morning, but he spent the day in a haze of anticipation.

In the forenoon, he found his way to the Methodist church recommended by the minister at Chatham. He had promised his mother that he would go to church once every Sunday. He enjoyed the service; the sermon happened to fall in very inspiringly with his high spiritual purpose.

In the afternoon he composed long letters to Vera and his mother. Vera had not written him a second time, but he found a half-dozen excuses for her.

"The first commission I make, I'll hurry back to Chatham and surprise her," he resolved. He imagined her glad cry of welcome; he felt her in his embrace.

When he arrived at the office of the Security Realty Company Monday morning, the big room was crowded with salesmen. He spoke to Mr. O'Neill and threaded his way down to Eberenz's desk. Poole was there ahead of him—that mustn't happen again!—and before nine o'clock five other salesmen reported to the optimistic superintendent.

Lee learned with considerable disquietude that Poole had brought a prospect out to "Eastwood" Sunday morning. Eberenz had helped Poole, and seemed to think the prospect might buy. Evidently, Lee had underestimated his rival.

To both of his new salesmen, the superintendent now turned over packs of cards with names written on them.

"Call on each one of these people," he directed. "Get as many of 'em interested as you can."

Lee examined his cards with consuming interest. The first card read as follows: "James Hennessey, 225 Saeger street." The second card bore the address, "226 Saeger street"; the third, "228 Saeger street." Glancing through the pack, he discovered that all the addresses were on Saeger street, running from No. 225 to 615. It struck him as odd that all these prospects should live on the same street—and so close together. Then the probable explanation flashed through his mind: his employers had seen that he was an especially promising new salesman and had assigned him one of their best routes.

"Go to it!" encouraged Eberenz with a wink and an expansive grin. He gave his new salesmen a stock of calling cards bearing the Company's name and address. "Leave one of these cards wherever they'll take it. Maybe they'll change their mind after you've left."

Saeger street proved to be something of a shock. Lee's lithe imagination always visualised everything in advance, and he had instinctively pictured Saeger street as a broad, asphalt avenue, with neat, brightly painted houses, well set back behind trees and green front yards. The reality was quite the reverse: the street was in one of the city's poorest quarters; it was narrow and not paved at all—a mass of wet mud; the houses were old, had long since forgotten the feel of paint, and encroached on the very edge of the sidewalks.

But Lee's cheerfulness was unquenchable that morning. The firm had started him out in an unprepossessing district to test his mettle. Well, he would show them. Besides, what a splendid opportunity for doing good! How much happier every one of these Saeger street people would be, free from the tyranny of grasping landlords, out in the fresh air and sunshine of beautiful "Eastwood." How they would thank him in later years for showing them the light!

His heart was beating faster than usual as he mounted

the sagging steps of No. 225 and twisted the rusty bell-handle. His first call! The inception of a notable career! Some day, History might——

The door was pulled open, and a gravid, irascible-eyed Irish woman confronted him. Behind her, clinging to the folds of her calico "wrapper," appeared a four-year-old girl with a sticky smear across her face. From within proceeded the petulant outcries of a baby.

"Mrs. Hennessey?" Lee raised his fedora and displayed his most ingratiating smile.

The woman wiped her hands on her apron, and nodded with surly inquiry. A rush of warm, moist, rancid air enveloped Lee—assailed his nostrils.

"I am Mr. Hillquit, from the Security Realty Company. I understand you and Mr. Hennessey are interested in real estate, and I want to take you both out——"

"What's that?" interpolated Mrs. Hennessey. "Who told you all that?"

"I was informed that——"

"Well, *who* informed you, is what I want t' know."

The baby's cries became louder, more insistent, and Mrs. Hennessey spoke sharply to the little girl: "Go hush him up, Gladys—can't ye?"

Gladys' viscid face betrayed extreme reluctance, but she disappeared obediently.

Lee's first instinct had been to loan Gladys his pocket handkerchief; but now a happier inspiration came to him.

"What a bright little girl," he commented.

But Mrs. Hennessey's hostile eyes did not soften. She was manifestly above the corrupting influence of flattery.

"Well," she pursued, "who told you?"

The new salesman's benevolent smile began to look a thought artificial. "Why, the officers of the Security Realty Company gave me to understand that you and your husband were tired of paying rent and were interested——"

"Never heard of any of 'em," disclaimed Mrs. Hennessey irately.

The baby's complaints rose yet higher; evidently Gladys' ministrations had proved completely unavailing. Mrs. Hennessey moved a step backward and made a tentative movement to terminate the interview.

"But you ought to be interested in real estate. You don't want——"

"Well, we *ain't* interested—an' we ain't askin' any kids like you f'r advice, neither." Mrs. Hennessey doubtless believed in bringing such skirmishes to an end while the laurels rested with her; for at this juncture, she closed the door smartly. It might be said, indeed, that she slammed it.

Despite his angry mortification, Lee shook his head a little sadly as he descended the stairs. It was certainly too bad when people acted so unreasonably. They were just working themselves an injury, that was all.

As he picked his way between mud-puddles across the street, his fear of ridicule made him look back furtively at the windows of the Hennessey home. Mrs. Hennessey had evidently sped back to the baby; she was not visible; but little Gladys, released from nurse-maid duties, parted the front curtains and stuck out her tongue at him with manifest disdain.

Number 226 Saeger street yielded no response to Lee's vigorous rings. He fancied he detected some movement behind the window curtains. The occupants must have witnessed his rebuff by Mrs. Hennessey. An alarming idea struck Lee. Did he look like an "agent"? Would people refuse to answer door-bells? Once more he recalled the young Jew's sneer at insurance agents. He had been thinking of himself as a "representative."

Number 228 was vacant; but Number 232 proved friendlier.

"Is Mr. Schemansky in?" he inquired of the old lady who opened the door.

The old lady shook her head. "Oh no!" she informed him in high quavering tones. "Schemanskys ain't lived here in six months."

Lee started to go, then turned back quickly. "My name is Hillquit," he began again. "From the Security Realty Company. I wonder if you people would be interested in looking at our subdivisions. You have to make only a small payment down, and the rest in easy monthly installments. When you have your lot paid for, we loan you money to build, and you pay us back just as you would rent. Before long, you own your own home."

Lee felt better. It was pleasant to be permitted to expound his brief argument without being interrupted.

But the old lady shook her head once more. "My man, he get hurt on the railroad las' month, an' we must move to a cheaper house. We got no money t' buy lots with." She cackled mirthlessly at the absurdity of the idea.

At Number 229, a small boy told him that both his parents were "out workin'." Numbers 230, 231 and 233 produced decisive refusals. Nobody answered the door bell at 235.

His tenth call brought the first faint glimmer of success. Mrs. Otto Roehrig, who lived over the saloon at Number 240, listened to him with seeming interest. Finally, she had him come into her little parlor and explain the whole thing over again. She was a young, sturdy woman with a blond, Saxon face and a thick neck and arms. When he dilated on the beauty of owning one's own home, he saw her hand tighten. She scrutinised his plat-maps with poorly concealed eagerness.

She told Lee finally that he had better come some night and talk with her husband, who was a foreman in a shoe factory.

"I do not think he will buy," she concluded with a trace of regret. "But maybe you can persuade him."

Greatly encouraged, Lee set out again. At noon he took an hour off for lunch; then worked faithfully until five o'clock.

Back in his rooms, that night he summed up his first day's labors. He found he had made forty-eight calls. On twenty-seven cards he had scribbled, "N. G."; on ten, "Moved"; nine, "Not home." The remaining two calls had produced what he believed were real prospects: Roehrig and a man named Veenfliets. He knew he had made a favorable impression on the two wives. He planned to make calls on the husbands some night that week.

One thing puzzled him. He had taken it for granted, from what Eberenz had said, that all these people had previously been interviewed by some representative of the Realty Company. Obviously, this was not the case. Not one person had ever before heard of the Security Realty Company.

But what surprised him most was the dull inertia of the people—the leaden weight of apathy. He had gone among them with the high spirit of an evangelist, intent on helping them; and they not only rejected his suggestions—they resented them. The common assumption seemed to be that he was trying to "put something over" on them. Their rebuffs wounded him keenly, dulled the fine edge of his self-confidence. Every time he thought of going through the same ordeal to-morrow, and day after to-morrow, and many days thereafter, he winced a little. But then he remembered all his splendid ambitions for himself. He thought of Vera, too.

In the morning, he seemed to have recovered all his first zest. He decided he must have been very tired the night before. He must get over being sensitive.

Eberenz congratulated him warmly upon interesting Mrs. Roehrig and Mrs. Veenfliets.

"That's fine! Get the women folks first. They're the best persuaders in the world."

Lee began to feel that he had done rather well.

That day, he worked six blocks farther east on Saeger street. His matutinal enthusiasm faded out perceptibly by noon under the pitiless glare of continuous failure. He lost completely the philanthropic zeal that had thrilled him at first. The work became mere drudgery. Every additional call seemed a more galling ordeal than the last. Yet he stuck to his guns doggedly throughout the long afternoon, forcing himself to do his best.

At last he turned toward downtown, his face grey with dust, fatigue and discouragement. He had not ensnared one real prospect. Two men had said they might be interested in the spring, and he had left the firm's card with each of them. In fact, he had distributed over twenty cards during the two days, each card with his own name written in the lower left hand corner.

His woeful lack of success stirred up in Lee a mild frenzy. He determined to call on his two prospects of the day before.

Otto Roehrig was adamant in refusing even to discuss the matter with Lee. His squat form blocked the doorway; behind him, Lee caught sight of Mrs. Roehrig's wistful face.

John Veenfliets, however, listened willingly enough to his arguments, and Lee had a feeling that here at last he was destined to achieve success. Veenfliets was a cutter in a tailor shop. His impassive Scandinavian face was a perfect mask to his state of mind, but Lee fancied that he was prepossessed by the idea of owning his own home.

"And as an investment, the purchase of one of our lots would be splendid," pursued Lee, his altruistic fervor rising. "You'll thank us for selling it to you."

At this, Veenfliets' broad countenance became obstinate-looking.

"No, I t'ink not." He explained that he had bought a lot three years before on a monthly payment plan. When he had made payments for a year, he lost his position and was unable to keep up the installments. The owner of the land forfeited the contract and kept Veenfliets' money.

After that, nothing Lee could say sufficed to alter Veenfliets' unfavorable verdict. The battle was lost.

Lee walked the three miles to his rooms. There was no denying that the day had been an absolute failure. But why? He had worked faithfully; he had had the finest of motives—had really tried to help these people. It was very puzzling. Things never eventuated that way in the books he had read.

VII

THOSE first two discouraging days were fair samples of Lee Hillquit's life in Detroit that first winter.

The experience took something away from him that he never quite recovered—something youthful, joyous, hopeful, idealistic. The ordeal left a scar upon his spirit that never quite healed over. It was part of a process that most idealists undergo—a callousing, hardening process that discards as futile all fine, whimsical fancies and illusions. Men who are born insensitive, "practical," can have no conception of the agonising readjustments of this slow disillusion.

Every morning, Lee would report at the office punctually, and drink in as much of Eberenz's optimism as possible before starting out on his day's work. He came to depend on that early talk with Eberenz. The superintendent never was pessimistic, never intimated that Lee was anything but an astounding success. Also, it was warm and comfortable in the office, and as winter came on, Lee fairly had to tear himself away to his daily drudgery.

Saturday was a day he looked forward to all week. The salesmen's meetings never failed to give him an emotional spree, a sort of pleasurable titillation. It reminded him of the time several years back, when he had been "converted." He would go to the salesmen's meetings each week feeling very unworthy, just as in high school days he had felt keen pleasure in attending the Chatham prayer meetings, and joining in the gospel hymn:

"Would He devote that sacred head,
For such a worm as I?"

And indeed, he made a practice of sidling into the salesmen's meetings feeling very like a worm, because the lower his spirits at the beginning of the meeting, the more profound the delight of listening to Mr. Hauxhurst's flagellating harangue and feeling the slow stimulus to his ambition. Presently his mood would vault to the heroic once more. He would sense the thrill of invincible determination all over again. He hated to leave the meetings; he got more out of them than he did from the church service that he regularly attended each Sunday evening.

One of his earliest tragedies occurred when Poole—Poole, the despised, the easily outstripped—took his first prospect out to "Eastwood" on the third Sunday, and actually sold him a lot. The prospect paid down fifty dollars, ten per cent. of the price of the lot; and the next day Poole showed Lee a check from the firm for twenty-five dollars.

"An' they's plenty more where he come from," he vaunted, his wide-apart, irregular teeth showing through his drooping moustache.

This was surely a crushing blow. A man without half of Lee's education or personal presence was forging ahead of him in the race. It was but small comfort that the weeks went by without Poole's closing another deal.

Lee completed his work in Saeger street early in November without achieving anything that even threatened to become a sale; and started out on a second, equally disreputable thoroughfare, designated Adler avenue.

Certain realisations began to force themselves upon his consciousness. It became clear that he was going through the day's work very mechanically—merely observing outward forms as a sop to his conscience. His early persuasion that he was rendering these people a splendid service had almost entirely vanished. They couldn't understand his unselfish attitude. Besides, stories like Veenfliets'—tales of

the frequent decline in real estate values—shook his faith in the righteousness of his mission.

During the first week, he had set fifty calls as the standard of a day's work; and now he found himself hurrying through this apportionment as rapidly as possible, so that he might conscientiously return to the warmth of his rooms and the solace of a good novel. He was no longer disappointed when people failed to answer the door-bell—he only rang once now—or when they had moved. Some days he made no new calls at all, but contented himself with visiting some of the pseudo-prospects he had called on previously.

But a more profound and devastating doubt was at work in him. Instinctively he had a very lofty code of personal ethics. He believed implicitly in the most scrupulous fairness—"all the cards on the table." It was woven into the very fibre of his being to assume that every man was as honest as himself.

The first shock to this conception was the universal suspicion and distrust of his motives. Lee had been quite sincere in his idea that he was helping the people he called on. He was thoroughly convinced that the purchase of real estate would make them save money, would free them from the tentacles of grasping landlords, and give them the satisfactions of owning their own homes. He was conscientious in the extreme. Yet the more honest he tried to be, the more certain he was to see a look of suspicion creep into their faces.

One night in November, for example, he felt certain for a few moments that he was about to make his first sale. His prospect was a stolid English widow who owned a grocery store. Lee was sure she had money and that the idea appealed to her as an investment. When she agreed to look at a lot in "Eastwood" the next morning, Lee's hungry exhilaration knew no bounds.

An afterthought struck Mrs. Raymond. "What happens if I can't make a payment?"

This was not an unusual question; and Lee always endeavored to be entirely frank in his answer. He explained that the company was very liberal in such matters, but that in extreme cases the contract would probably be forfeited. As he talked he watched the old familiar distrust grow in her bland, inexpressive face.

"And how much do you say these lots will increase in value?" she demanded.

Here was another question that he felt under obligation to answer very honestly—particularly in this instance, where he was dealing with a widow.

"I think the property is sure to go up—just how much, I can't say, of course," he told her. "Very likely it will double in value in ten years. Of course that is only my opinion."

The widow looked at him heavily. "It might go down," she set forth.

Lee nodded. "Yes, it might, but I don't think so."

At that, Mrs. Raymond abruptly decided not to buy an "Eastwood" lot.

This incident served to bring to a head a number of questions that had been taking shape in his mind. If he had only pooh-poohed the very notion of the owner forfeiting her contract, if he had but assured her that the land would positively reap her an enormous profit, Mrs. Raymond would have bought, he felt sure. His scrupulous honesty had simply killed the sale.

What was he to do? He wanted to be conscientious; but if being conscientious meant failure—well, he wasn't so sure.

In the end, he put the problem up to Eberenz. The superintendent had always seemed honest, without being squeamish.

As Lee told his story, he caught a look of perplexity in Eberenz's eye.

"You're a funny chap, Hillquit," commented the superintendent. "I can't make you out in some ways. Here's the point you don't get: sellin' anything is a fight. People won't buy unless they have to. You got t' persuade 'em against their wills, or they'll be persuadin' you you're no good. It's a battle every minute. You got t' get the drop on 'em, or they will on you."

Lee chewed on this novel theory a moment. "But what if people ask you questions? You can't deceive them."

"Deceive 'em! No!" Eberenz spat emphatically. "Just soft-pedal the disagreeable stuff! Act as if you didn't think anything sad ever happened in life. Trouble with you is, you tell 'em all the gloomy stuff and act as if you thought it was sure t' happen."

All this seemed plausible enough—and extraordinarily interesting, in the bargain. "Get the drop on 'em!" Stop arguing, as two reasonable humans might be expected to do. Grab your prospect around the neck, figuratively; throw him down, and if necessary, jump on him with both feet! You might hurt him, but you were really trying to help him.

Lee made it his business to get acquainted with some of the company's "star" salesmen, and to investigate their ethics toward prospects. All but one of them upheld the policy of open, honest dealing. No one could speak fairer than they.

The one exception was a tall, lanky, shambling character named Bert Kirschman, familiarly known as "Shorty." He looked fifty, but surprised Lee one day by disclosing that he was only thirty-six. He carried his head a bit forward, and seemed to peer out from beneath the protecting thickets of his eye-brows. His eyes were watery, his teeth discolored and irregular.

Him Lee came gradually to know. He seemed aloof and surly much of the time; but over a cold stein of beer he could be relied on to unbend.

One day Lee broached the subject of real estate ethics.

"Say, Shorty, how do you figure out all this talk about a real estate man's duty to his prospects? Most of the fellows claim they're always on the square with people."

Kirschman regarded Lee with a dubious eye.

"What d' y' think you're doin'—kiddin' me?"

Lee almost smiled. "No, I'm perfectly serious. I want the real dope about the game—that's all."

The successful salesman finished his beer and tapped Lee's chest with a wet forefinger.

"That Sunday School talk's all bunk, Sonny. Every live wire in the office has pulled some pretty rough stuff. They'll tell a prospect anything in order to sell him. I've done it, and I'll do it again."

"But good Lord, Shorty, you don't defend downright dishonesty, do you?"

Kirschman's look was three-quarters contempt, and one-quarter reminiscent approbation. "Look here—you asked me for the real dope, didn't you? Well then, don't drive me into playin' the hypocrite too. Those other lads are jus' kiddin' you, and everybody in the office is snickerin' at the way you eat up the God-Awmighty stuff." He rapped on the bar impatiently.

Lee felt his face grow red. "Well, I've tried to play the game square, anyway."

Kirschman observed his questioner's mortification. "Course you have, Kid. A lot of us start that way—but it can't be done." He took an ample gulp out of his fresh stein, and concluded: "There's only one question people ask about a man nowadays—not what his morals are, nor even whether he's honest or not, but—does he get away with it?"

Other illuminating aspects of the real estate business came to light at intervals.

Late one afternoon, Lee stopped in at the office to replenish his supply of calling cards. He found O'Neill and Eberenz in the sales manager's office talking with a middle-aged woman. Presently the woman burst into tears and left the office.

"What's the row?" Lee asked as Eberenz came back to his desk.

The superintendent ran his finger around the inside of his collar. "Oh, just a fool woman wantin' her money back. More'n a year overdue in her payments already. Nothin' for us t' do but cancel."

Toward the middle of December, Lee missed Poole. His rival had made no further sales, and Lee had remarked his increasing gauntness of aspect, the frayed edges of his coat sleeves, the growing slovenliness of his linen.

"He's quit," vouchsafed Eberenz lightly. "He didn't have no guts. I knowed he couldn't make good."

Next week, Lee came upon Poole in a Sherman street car. The ex-salesman's lean lower jaw protruded even farther than before; his attenuation of feature was startling. Lee couldn't help feeling sorry for his late rival. Poole's pretence that he had secured some mysterious and superior employment was pathetically palpable. It was only when he finally broke out about the Security Realty Company that he became convincing.

"Damn 'em!" he swore, looking more than ever like a highly indignant shad. "Pump a man full of hot air, so's he'll starve himself tryin' t' sell their filthy lots. Copy names out of the directory onto cards, and make a man think they're givin' him names of real prospects. Tell him t' leave their cards everywhere, so's they'll git plenty of free advertisin'! Let a man start out to learn the game in

the fall, when they know dam' well nobody can sell lots except in spring an' summer. They're a bunch of crooks, an' if you got any sense, Hillquit, you'll do jus' what I done—give 'em a good bawlin' out, an' ditch 'em."

VIII

OTHER troubles deepened his slough of despond these bleak December days.

He still wrote to his mother and Vera with specious, hazy optimism. Both of them had been urging him all fall to spend a week-end at Chatham; and his excuses had become increasingly lame. He still adhered tenaciously to his first resolution—not to go home until he had made his first sale.

Vera, in particular, waxed almost insistent. He was conscious of a beseeching note in her recent letters. "I need you, dear," she had written him. "Why don't you come to me?" He had sent her some unconvincing excuse, and thereafter he fancied he could detect a subtle change in the spirit of her letters, something increasingly apathetic.

But he had no money to waste in railroad fare. He needed every penny of his mother's remittances to defray his actual living expenses.

Without doubt, his mother would gladly have sent him the necessary additional money. She hinted as much in more than one letter. But it hurt Lee's pride enough to take his regular allowance of ten dollars without asking for more. Twenty-three years old—and living on his mother's bounty! The thought was deeply galling. Besides, he knew she couldn't afford it. It must be a serious problem for her to make ends meet on what she had left of her annuity. Vera inadvertently disclosed the fact that his mother was giving piano lessons. It was all too evident she had been forced to do so to eke out a living.

To all his other distressing troubles, add a particularly insidious one—loneliness.

His only familiar was Bob Hamilton; and Bob was exactly the wrong sort of companion for a man in Lee's predicament. There was nothing robust about Bob's spirit. Instead, he was tremulously self-abasing, forever deprecating himself, wondering why he wasn't more successful in his newspaper work.

Lee's one other friend in the city, Fred Badger, had failed to telephone him after their first meeting. It was not until the middle of November—two months after his arrival in Detroit—that Lee again encountered him on the street. Fred was not even apologetic. He seemed friendly enough, but so breezy, so self-sufficient.

Lee, however, could not help pouring out something of his troubles.

"That's tough, old top!" There was no real concern in Fred's tone. His eyes were alert, combative; and Lee was once more conscious that he was being appraised—only this time, his friend's verdict seemed more definitely unfavorable.

Fred turned away. "Well, so-long. Get your shoulders into it! See you soon!"

A few weeks afterward, Lee's sense of loneliness got the better of his pride. He telephoned Fred, and was overjoyed when his friend accepted his invitation to lunch.

At first Fred seemed to be exhibiting the same aloof attitude; but over their coffee, he suddenly became expansive about himself. Times were really hard for bond salesmen, he confided; but he himself had done very well. He related various encounters—always victorious encounters—with the city's leading bankers. Lee, ever given to taking people at their own estimate, regarded Fred enviously. His very appearance breathed success; there seemed power in his prominent brows. He was not boastful, yet he had an easy self-confidence that readily convinced people of his ability.

He was "in Society," too. He spoke lightly of dinner dances and theatre parties.

"By the way, how do you stand on the girl question?" he asked abruptly.

Lee intimated that his affections were engaged by a "girl back in Chatham."

"How much money has she?" the young bond salesman inquired.

Lee, taken aback, became evasive. "I never thought much about that part of it," he set forth.

"Well, you'd better." Fred leaned forward. "Marriage makes or breaks a man. The chap who marries the right sort of girl is practically made."

"What do you mean by the 'right sort of girl'?"

"Oh, I guess you know what I mean." Fred showed his even, white teeth. "A girl that can help him. If she has money, so much the better. Anyway, she's got to have position, influence. Between you and me, I think it's a mistake for a young fellow to marry an out-of-town girl."

This was a novel viewpoint on matrimonial standards.

"Understand, I'm not saying a word against the girl 'back home,'" protested Fred. "I'm only looking at marriage from a practical standpoint. Here you are in Detroit, just starting out. Right now, you're sort of unplaced—that is, you have no fixed position, socially or financially. An unattached young man—a college man, especially—can almost pick his own crowd. He can travel middle-class or high-class, just as he wants. It almost all depends on the women he goes with. Maybe you don't realise how much influence women have. You marry some girl without money or position, and everybody'll snub you. But marry a girl in the right set, and the way's paved for you."

Lee was impressed, but skeptical. "You don't honestly believe in marrying for money?"

Fred's lower lip protruded judicially. "If you put it

that way—no. But I believe it's just as easy to fall in love with a girl who has money as with one who hasn't. It depends on what sort of girls you're training with. As I see this love game, it's all a matter of propinquity."

Lee couldn't help launching into a spirited defence of disinterested, exalted love; but Fred remained quite unconvinced, and a little disdainful, besides.

At two o'clock he alleged an important engagement and left his host with disconcerting briskness.

"You must have lunch with me some day soon," he averred, and was off.

In spite of Fred's apparent lack of interest in everybody but himself, Lee felt that the luncheon had been a success. It was the first oasis after a long stretch of arid days. He hoped Fred would telephone him soon. Not that he agreed with his friend's ideas about marriage. They sounded mercenary, he thought, in spite of Fred's plausible way of putting them. Why, he could no more think of giving up Vera for some rich city girl than he could consider purse-snatching as a profession.

Still, he was vaguely pleased by Fred Badger's assurance that he might, if he chose, become a "Society man." There was an alluring glamor surrounding that mysterious world of dinner-dances, balls, teas. He observed haughty looking girls in limousines; they must be *débutantes*. He had noticed pictures of prominent "Society women" in the Sunday newspapers. He began to read the "Social Columns," and tried to imagine the delights of such an existence. Whenever he came across Fred Badger's name, he felt a glow of pride in their friendship.

He still went to the Methodist church at least once on Sunday. He had presented a letter of introduction to the Reverend Twiggs, the minister, soon after coming to Detroit, and within a few weeks had transferred his membership from the Chatham church. [The deacons of the city church,

had taken note of his coming; he was early solicited to take a class in the Sunday School, but compromised by serving as substitute usher Sunday nights.

His church connection ought to have given him the necessary social outlet, but somehow the spirit of that particular church failed to appeal to him. Possibly, his University life had made him skeptical about all religious creeds. And the people themselves he found narrow-minded and decidedly cold. Three-fourths of the congregation were women; the few men he saw were wishy-washy specimens.

One blustery Wednesday night in December, when Lee happened to be attending prayer-meeting, an untoward incident happened. The worshippers had just finished singing "Throw Out the Life Line." During the period given over to "Personal Experiences," an unkempt, forlorn looking man rose from the last row of chairs in the chapel. Everybody felt a little twitch of surprise at the appearance of such a person in the meeting.

"I've been in Detroit a week looking for work," explained the shabby intruder. "I haven't had anything to eat for two days, and I'm desperate. If any of you church people can help me land a job, I beg you to do it. If I can't get work, I'm going down to the foot of Woodward Avenue and jump in the river."

The man spoke in a low, distinct voice, in educated accents. There was a perceptible flutter of excitement among the worshippers. Meanwhile the stranger stood motionless.

The Reverend Twiggs coughed nervously; some of the deacons threw disturbed glances at the man; but no one moved.

The tension lasted a moment longer, then the unkempt man gave a little contemptuous laugh and left the chapel.

A buzz of whispering rose. Two deacons followed the

man out, and Lee breathed more easily. Surely they would do something.

Almost immediately the meeting sang "God Be With You Till We Meet Again," and received the Reverend Twiggs' benediction.

Then there was a rush into the corridors. The two deacons were there—but not the suppliant for help. They had let the man go out into the storm after all. One of them gave the reason:

"We smelled liquor on his breath."

Somehow this failed to satisfy Lee. The man really seemed sincere in wanting work. If he had been drinking, that was additional reason why church members should give him a helping hand. But every one seemed to approve of what the deacons had done. There was a general feeling of indignation that such a man should have been permitted to disturb the prayer-meeting; and Olaf, the janitor, was reprimanded for not having intercepted him. The worshippers wanted no more raw life to break through into their steam-heated religious atmosphere.

The following Sunday evening another illuminating experience befell Lee.

One of the ushers, a poor-complexioned, colorless young fellow named Templeton Beman, approached him shortly before the service, and drew a folded document from an inside pocket.

"Say, sign this, will you? All the other ushers have."

Lee observed a printed petition at the top of the paper.

"What is it for?" he asked, as he reached for his pencil.

"It's to abolish all Catholic nunneries—tear 'em down to the ground," Beman expounded.

"But why?" Lee backed away a little to avoid the other usher's bad breath.

"Why?" demanded Beman incredulously. "Because they're Roman Catholic prisons, that's why. Haven't you

ever heard how they seal up young girls—Protestant girls, too—inside cells and let 'em starve to death, 'cause they won't turn Catholic?"

Lee took simultaneous note of Beman's soiled collar and ignorant, fanatical eyes. "Why no, I can't sign this," he decided. "I don't know that what you say is true; and until I have positive proof, I believe in letting everybody worship in his own way."

Beman's bigoted, bespectacled countenance reflected utter amazement.

"I didn't know you was a friend of Rome," was his crushing retort. He would hardly speak to Lee thereafter; he whispered the scandal to the other ushers.

Here was as dangerous and morbid a religious fanatic as any Jesuit priest that ever drew breath. Lee glanced over the faces of the congregation. Obviously, there were many Bemens among them.

The annual business meeting of the church the week before Christmas helped complete Lee's distaste for the spirit of his church. He had already experienced its uncharitableness and its bigotry. Now he was to witness downright sordidness. When the members began to bid for the choicest pews in the church, the House of God changed instantly into a clamorous market. Lee saw men grow red with anger, as their favorite pews were bought away from them; saw fists raised in the air; heard excited, angry voices.

A still more arresting phenomenon was destined to present itself to his scrutiny that night.

As he walked up the street towards home, a girl spoke to him. She was standing on a corner, under a street light. He lifted his hat politely under the impression that she had asked him a question.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I didn't understand what you said."

Then all at once he saw her face. She was young and rather pretty, except for the too-conspicuous nostrils of her upturned nose. Her mouth was defiant, and her high cheek-bones were rouged.

His heart pounded in his chest. The girl was a prostitute! He had heard about such women, of course; he fancied he had seen them in the streets before this. But here was one actually brazen enough to accost him. He stiffened with horror.

The girl smiled. A gold crown on one of her teeth glistened in the white light from the arc-lamp.

"Hello, kiddo," she said.

He glanced apprehensively up the avenue. What if any one should see him!

"What do you want?" he asked in tones that were calculated to be righteously indignant, but only sounded tremulous.

By way of unequivocal answer, the girl made use of a revolting expression that fairly paralysed him.

"I guess you've made a mistake," he said stiffly, and walked away.

He waited for the traditional scornful laugh, but none came. He chanced a quick look back, and found the girl staring soberly after him. Standing there in the cold, she looked forlorn rather than wicked.

He wondered why the girl on the street corner seemed more real, more vital, than most of his fellow church members.

IX

LEE spent Christmas and the holidays alone in Detroit. Even Bob Hamilton went home for a couple of days.

When Lee wrote that he would be unable to leave the city, Mrs. Hillquit suggested that she would like to come to Detroit. But he discouraged the project and promised to go home within a week or two after New Year's. Vera also wrote a discouraged little note asking him if he had really stopped caring for her.

Late New Year's Eve, he sat in his deserted rooms, forlornly wondering how much longer he could keep his courage up.

All at once, a factory whistle opened noisy salute to the New Year. The tumult grew: other whistles, deep and vibrant or high and shrill, some near, some distantly faint, swelled the chorale. Now the sounds of deep-throated church bells came eddying and volleying through the winter air.

Lee switched off the light, opened the window a little. There was something eerie, supernatural, in the shrieking of the whistles, in the wafted sounds of the bells. Something inspiring, too—an imperious summons to new ambition, new determination.

He had yielded too easily, too cravenly. He hadn't half tried. His ambition stirred, his hope revived. He took a great resolve. He would make a success of the real estate business. Nothing should keep him back. He would marry Vera in the spring. Poor Vera! No wonder she

was perplexed and discouraged. And his mother, too: how overjoyed she would be at his success. All his doubts about life, all his misgivings about the real estate business, vanished like mists before the warmth of his new and splendid enthusiasm.

He pulled the old volume of "Fisk's Encyclopædia" from his trunk and turned to the pictures of "The Two Paths." He looked at himself in the mirror. Thank Heaven, no marks of dissipation or signs of failure yet revealed themselves on his face. There was still time for him to choose the right path, to go down through life a respected and successful man.

The second day of January, accordingly, found Lee starting out all over again, with an invincible determination to succeed. Eberenz noted the change, congratulated him, and prophesied an early triumph for him.

Success, it seemed, remained coy, notwithstanding. Lee fought on stubbornly. Each week-day in January and February, he trudged conscientiously from door to door, spreading the gospel of home ownership, battling the ignorance and short-sightedness of landlords' victims, meeting rebuffs and suspicion with a set smile. He shut his mind to the possibility of failure—even though the days went by without bringing the faintest shimmer of hope. Nobody liked the idea of going out to look over windswept subdivisions in the dead of winter. The force of salesmen of the Security Realty Company dwindled to a mere handful.

The weather grew colder and colder. Some days, Lee suffered intensely from the piercing winter air. The matter of clothing loomed up as a source of worry. He had been able to buy nothing new. His last year's winter suit was beginning to wear ominously thin in spots. His overcoat was really nothing but a raincoat. It seemed to offer only a faint-hearted resistance to the cold.

One night, he returned to his room to find a disturbing

letter from his mother. She first recounted the usual details of her daily existence.

"There's something I feel it my duty to write you about," her last paragraph began. "Something about Vera. I don't think she is doing quite right by you. Milo Higginson comes over from Record pretty near every day to see her, and I hear things about them. You know Mrs. Wakefield is very ambitious for Vera. I am only telling you this so you will be on your guard.

"Your loving mother."

Lee stared. Then he laughed. If there was one certainty in the world—one fixed star in the heavens—it was Vera's trustworthiness. He needn't worry about Vera. She loved him, he knew; and she would always love him. A mutual devotion like theirs was eternal. For an instant he had a blind instinct to rush to the station and catch the first train for Chatham.

True, Vera's letters were increasingly colorless. She was suffering as cruelly as he from their enforced separation, and he saw no reason why she shouldn't let other men call on her.

"Milo Higginson!" he grinned. "The idea of Vera ever falling in love with a red-faced dough-head like him!"

When he wrote his mother, he ignored her accusations. But Mrs. Hillquit seemed insistent.

"I hope you weren't hurt by what I said about Vera," her next letter ran. "I only didn't want you to be fooled by her."

Lee smiled and read on.

"You don't write when you are coming home, my dear son, nor how you are getting along. Don't you think you have had about enough of Detroit? I do so wish sometimes that you would see your way clear to coming back to Chatham and settling down here. I know you could get a good position in the bank."

During the winter months, he continued to attend church Sunday evenings, in spite of his distaste for certain aspects

of applied Christianity. Acting as usher was a change and a relief from his hard work during the week. It gave him a pleasant sense of self-importance to show people to their pews, to help take up the collection. He enjoyed the big pipe-organ, and he liked to watch the people and to speculate about the more prominent members. He even contrived to be introduced to some of them.

He could not help noticing how his fellow-ushers always manoeuvred for the honor of showing a certain distinguished-woman to her accustomed place.

"Who is she?" he asked the head usher one Sunday night.

The other expanded with the sense of portentous revelation. "Why, that's Mrs. Tom Curran, the richest woman in the church. She owns one-third of the Curran store down on Woodward Avenue."

After that, Lee observed Mrs. Curran more closely, whenever she came to church. She was a woman of about forty, a little below average height, with a slender, well-formed figure. Her eyes were markedly black; they dominated her whole face. She always wore simple, but very stylish clothing. Most startling of all, she came to church in a closed automobile, driven by a chauffeur.

When Lee was introduced a few Sundays later, he was tremendously overawed.

Mrs. Curran gave him a quick comprehensive look.

"How long have you been here?"

"Just a few months," stumbled Lee. "I only graduated from college last spring."

Mrs. Curran made use of one or two conventionally pleasant expressions, and passed on.

What a remarkable woman! He made inquiries about her. Her husband had been one of the three founders and partners of the great department store of Curran & Company; and when he died, Mrs. Curran had inherited his stock in the concern. She was worth anywhere from one

hundred thousand dollars to half a million. She had no children. Her house was on Wells street, a fashionable avenue running off Woodward. She was a member of Detroit's oldest and most exclusive social circle.

Thenceforth Mrs. Curran always spoke pleasantly to him. One Sunday night after the service was over, she stopped a moment by the door where he was standing.

"Do you ever go to concerts?" she inquired.

Lee shook his head. "I haven't gone to any here, though I do like music."

Mrs. Curran held out a ticket. "Wouldn't you like to use this Tuesday night? It's for the New York Symphony concert. I just happen to have this extra ticket on my hands."

Lee took the ticket and thanked her profusely.

"It's awfully nice of you," he said.

The great lady smiled benignantly. "I never like to see a ticket go to waste."

Tuesday night Lee made his way to the Light Guard Armory in a state of high excitement. Self-consciously he followed an usher down one of the side aisles to a seat in the tenth row. Safely there, he looked furtively about him. It was his first symphony orchestra concert. The seventy musicians were already on the stage, and an utter confusion of sound attended their efforts to tune up. All around, Lee beheld impressive men and women in immaculate evening dress. In contrast with them, he felt obscure and inconsequential in his worn business suit.

His awed gaze swept the row of boxes that fringed the balcony. In one box a little to the left, his eye rested on a familiar figure. It was Fred Badger—attired as impeccably as any other member of the gay box-party. Lee stared curiously at the three girls who sat in the first row of the box. Their faces he could not descry, but he pictured them as indubitably beautiful. They must be "Society girls"—

débutantes, very likely. Fred leaned forward attentively over one of them—a girl with light hair. Perhaps she was the heiress that Fred was looking for. Lucky Fred!

Scattered hand-clapping announced the conductor of the orchestra. He bowed to the audience gravely, tapped smartly on his desk, raised his baton—and the concert began.

Much of the music made no appeal to Lee. The "Coriolanus Overture" left him puzzled. He could find little melody in the showy Russian trifles that ended the programme. The Tchaikowsky Symphony—the "Pathétique"—opened inauspiciously, too. Then all at once the violins broke out into a sweeping, stirring theme that held him spellbound. Throughout the symphony, indeed, his emotions remained tumultuous.

"That's wonderful!" he thought.

When the concert was over, he reluctantly joined the slow-moving crowd that choked the aisles. He was sorry the evening had come to an end. It had been an exciting event for him. He wondered why most of the people looked so bored.

His slow progress brought him at last to the Brush street door. Outside he heard the hoarse shouts of the doorman, calling carriage numbers. All about him were awesome "Society" men and women. Lee stared. What was the badge of their superior breeding? Some of them looked disdainful, some morose. A few—the women mostly—talked volubly, with a great show of teeth. Their laughter seemed shrill, he thought.

Lee felt forlorn, almost ignominious, decidedly out of all this consciously superior set. He was painfully aware of cutting a poor figure.

"Oh, I think Damrosch is *simply adorable!*" a girl's voice confided, almost behind him.

Lee looked around, and suddenly felt an elated thrill.

For the girl was speaking to none other than Fred Badger, resplendent in a top hat and evening dress.

Lee's pride came to life. He knew some one in this gay company, after all.

"Hello, Fred!" he said, and raised his soft hat gaily.

Fred Badger's eyes rested on him—seemed to be appraising every detail of his drab appearance.

Yes, Fred was looking directly at him—or was it *through* him? Slowly it came to Lee that his friend was deliberately cutting him. His mouth opened, his cheeks grew warm.

The girl was staring at him, too—haughtily.

"Thirty-seven!" shouted the door-man.

Fred's unrecognising eyes at last left Lee's erubescant countenance. "That's our number," he vouchsafed to the girl. They hastened down the remaining steps and hurried outside.

Lee stood there numbly a moment more, then dragged himself home. Of all his tribulations since he had come to Detroit, none had hurt him quite so grievously as this. He felt very much like a friendly puppy that has just received its first kick.

Fred was ashamed of him, thought friendship with him a handicap to his own success.

So passed for Lee the illusion about the eternal integrity of college friendships.

X

BUT the very next day, Fortune seemed to relent, ever so slightly.

Trudging hopelessly but methodically through the snow, from door to door—stifling the deep hurt of the night before—Lee at length rang the door-bell of Number 228 Wrisley street, occupied by Adrian Soomer.

Mrs. Soomer, a middle-aged Dutch *Hausfrau*, with hair plastered back into a little knot, betrayed sufficient interest to say that he might return some evening that week to confer with her “man.”

Friday night, therefore, Lee called again at the Soomer abode. Adrian Soomer was a saloon-keeper, about forty-five years old. His face was broad, flat and pock-marked; his moustache formidable; his hair bristly; the back of his head stubbornly straight.

For all that, he suffered Lee to explain his mission to the end.

“What I’d like to do would be to take you out to ‘Eastwood’ next Sunday,” said Lee mechanically.

Soomer pulled on his cigar stub. “Vell—maybe ve go—huh, mamma?” he interrogated his wife.

“Sure,” she assented.

Lee began to brighten. They were the best prospects he had come across in many a day. He made an appointment for ten o’clock the next Sunday morning, then hurried away before they could change their minds. He told Eberenz nothing about the Soomers. He had turned in too many false alarms already.

Sunday morning was bitterly cold and Soomer demurred

strongly to forsaking the glow of his sitting-room coal-stove. It was like pulling teeth to get the pair started.

Little wonder Lee was excited when they finally arrived at the desolate reaches of "Eastwood." In all his five months as a real estate salesman, he had not succeeded in taking a single prospect out to the subdivisions until to-day.

Mr. and Mrs. Soomer looked over the subdivision phlegmatically and without enthusiasm. Soomer walked back and forth along the sidewalk to keep from freezing. He turned in his toes as he walked; his gloveless hands he plunged into his side pockets.

"Now's the time to buy," Lee extemporised. "In another month everybody'll be wanting lots, and you won't be able to have such a choice. Besides, the price may go up."

The Soomers wouldn't commit themselves Sunday, but Monday night he was after them again, like a terrier after a rat. At the outset, the saloon-keeper's disposition was unfavorable. It seemed to Lee he talked to Soomer at least six hours that night. For the first time, he felt within himself a real ingenuity in argument, a real persuasiveness. There was something almost frenzied in his determined earnestness.

"Vell, I tell you," yielded Soomer at eleven o'clock. "I gif you fife dollars to-night as a deposit to holdt lot number fifty-seex." He indicated the lot in question with a stubby, unmanicured index finger.

Outwardly dignified, Lee wrote out a receipt for the money. "This will give you an option for forty-eight hours," he explained. "Within that time, you must pay the balance of ten per cent. of the price of the lot, five hundred and fifty dollars, and after that, five dollars and fifty cents or more each month."

He folded the worn five-dollar bill and put it in his vest pocket; then took his leave. Outside in the cold February night, his ecstasy broke all bounds. He leaped and

ran; he even shouted; he wanted to climb the walls of the buildings he passed.

The unutterable sweetness of Success! After the long procession of numb, despairing days, after the intolerable nightmare of failure, his victory had descended upon him with incredible swiftness. Every fibre of his being tingled with transcendent happiness. All his doubts about the essential Rightness of Things dissolved. It was a good world at that. It paid to be honest, industrious, ambitious. Shorty Kirschman was wrong: you didn't have to hoodwink people in order to sell them lots. He had won—he was going to be a splendid success after all.

And Vera! Now he could go back to Chatham in triumph. Dear, faithful Vera! How hard it had been for them to be separated—but how wonderful to feel her in his arms once more. Vera and he wouldn't be sorry in later years that they had gone through this ordeal. It had been a test.

He wrote her a hasty note that night, full of his success. "I'll get to Chatham Saturday afternoon," he promised. "I don't see how I've been able to live so long without seeing you." His letter would reach her Wednesday morning. He visualised her sudden, radiant happiness.

Bob Hamilton, too, had to be told something of the astounding news—not in great detail, for he had vaguely supposed that Lee was selling lots right along.

"That's great, Lee," he said. He himself was discouraged, as usual. "I don't see why I can't be a success too. Lord knows I try hard enough. Guess I simply haven't it in me." He wagged his large head dolefully from side to side; his eyes were troubled behind his thick-lensed spectacles; his sensitive lower lip trembled.

Next morning Lee jubilantly reported his sale to Eberenz, and turned over the deposit money.

The roguish old superintendent fairly beamed. "I knowed

you had it in you, my boy!" he acclaimed, as he clapped Lee boisterously on the back. With impressive ostentation, he dipped a small brush in red ink and marked Lot No. 56 off the big wall-map of "Eastwood." "Now you're started. The first deal's always the hardest one. I bet you sell six more lots in the next month!"

Six more! His commission on the Soomer deal would be \$27.50; on six lots more, \$165.00. Why, at that pace, he could marry Vera right away.

It was all too good to be true! What a difference it made in his day's work! He went from house to house with real courage, with new persuasiveness. There was no stopping him now; by Tuesday night, he had secured two more good prospects.

Wednesday morning, as he walked downtown, he reflected that Vera would just be receiving his letter. All at once he remembered with a guilty feeling that he had neglected to write his mother. He decided that he would send her a special delivery letter at once.

The sun shone down from a sky of deep, brilliant azure. The air bore the first hint of warmth, the first tremulous promise of spring. On all sides people were hurrying down to work. To-day he saw many faces that seemed optimistic, alert, purposeful. He revelled in the increasing roar of the city, rising and falling in pulsating waves; the noises of grating, creaking trolley-cars, of hoofbeats on the hard asphalt, of squawking motor horns; more than all this—filling in the interstices of these definable noises—a vast inchoate background of sound, proceeding from the mere proximity of thousands of people, elemental, diapasonic, indistinguishable—the overtones of the city.

At the office, Lee dashed off a note to his mother. As he was leaving, Eberenz called him back.

"By the way, Hillquit," he said, "I forgot to tell you. Soomer was in yesterday afternoon. He got cold feet on

that deal, and we finally had t' give him his five dollars back."

Lee took hold of the ledge of the superintendent's desk, and stared blankly. "What's that?"

Eberenz repeated the news, quite as if it were the most ordinary occurrence in the world.

Lee experienced an utter sickness of heart; it seemed for a moment as if the world were tumbling down; but he strove to conceal his bitter disappointment from the superintendent.

"Too bad," quoth Eberenz lightly, "but you're started, anyway. The next one'll come easier."

"I'll go and see Soomer," volunteered Lee. "Perhaps I can persuade him to change his mind."

The superintendent removed his impressive eye-glasses and rubbed the irritated indentations they left on the sides of his nose. "Don't believe I'd bother with him. I spent an hour workin' on him, an' I couldn't budge him. You know how stubborn a Dutchman is." He tapped his desk meditatively. "Tell you what: Wrisley street ain't much good, an' now you've showed you got the stuff, I'm goin' t' give you a better territory." He reached for a pile of cards. "Here's McAfee street—take a whirl at that."

Slowly Lee tore up the letter to his mother. He wondered inconsequentially how he had best break the news to Vera. Fight as he would, the fine bold flavor of his courage ran itself out drop by drop. Success had escaped him after all. He must begin the slow, uninspired grind all over again.

He forced himself out to McAfee street. For the life of him, he couldn't see why Eberenz considered it superior territory. He covered two blocks of it in apathetic fashion.

On the next corner appeared a saloon and he glanced inadvertently at the sign that hung over the doorway—then stopped short. The sign read: "Adrian Soomer, Café."

He opened the door and walked in. There could be no harm, he decided, in talking to Soomer, and there was a slight chance of inducing him to reconsider.

The proprietor, in shirt sleeves and apron, was busily serving three patrons. He nodded to Lee and presently gave him audience.

The real estate salesman bought a round of beer for Soomer and himself.

"I tell you, Mr. Soomer," he began earnestly, "I think you're making a big mistake in giving up that lot."

The saloon-keeper surveyed him with apparent bewilderment.

"But—but I haf not give oop dat lot," he asserted.

Lee, in turn, stared.

"I go down to your office yesterday—yes," affirmed Soomer. "I see Mr.—Mr.——"

"Mr. Eberenz?"

"Ja, I tell him I don't want dat lot, und he gif me my money back."

"Yes—that's what he told me," Lee interpolated.

"Vell, when I get half way to door, he call me back, and talk to me some more, und finally he persuade me to take dat lot. I gif him dat fife dollars back, und feefty dollars more to make first payment. I sign contract." He exhibited a land contract covering Lot 56, "Eastwood Subdivision."

"Why, Eberenz didn't tell me that!" Lee ejaculated in high excitement. "He just said you'd given up the lot."

Soomer shook his close-cropped, bristly head perplexedly. "I buy dat lot."

Lee caught the first street-car back to the office. There must be some mistake, he decided. His spirits began another rapid ascent. He leaped up the stairs and broke in on Eberenz.

"See here!" he exclaimed. "I just saw Soomer and he says he bought that lot after all."

A flicker of indecision came and went on the superintendent's face.

"Well, that's true, all right," he admitted.

"But you didn't tell me anything about that——"

Eberenz swung around sharply. "I told you Soomer gave up the lot, and he did. That was all that concerned you. Your part of the transaction was over. *Your* deal had fallen through. Then I stepped in, on my own hook, and sold him. That's *my* deal—see?"

Lee was non-plussed for a moment. "No, I don't see. Soomer was my customer. You were supposed to help me with him. That's your job." By now, he was aroused. He extended a determined forefinger toward the superintendent.

Eberenz looked disappointed. "Oh, well, if you're goin' to be unreasonable about it, I won't waste no breath on you. It's my commission and I'm goin' t' keep it."

Lee's forefinger merged into a fist—held close to the impressive eye-glasses. "We'll see about that!" was all he could say. His egregious wrath stifled him, made him ineffective.

"Go as far as you like," invited Eberenz imperturbably.

Lee spied O'Neill, the sales manager, sitting alone in his enclosure near the door. He marched indignantly forward.

"Mr. O'Neill!" he exploded. "I just made a sale, and now Eberenz is trying to steal my commission."

The sales manager's cold, peering eyes took stock of his visitor's angry nostrils and quivering mouth.

"That's a serious charge," he said with judicial impressiveness; then called: "Mr. Eberenz."

The conference that ensued was tantalizing. O'Neill led the two disputants into the private office of Mr. Hauxhurst, the eloquent general manager; adjured them to speak quietly and not to interrupt one another; then told Lee to tell his side of the affair.

Lee's anger still crippled his powers of speech, whereas

Eberenz had all the advantage of the man who never loses his temper. His story was effective, plausible.

O'Neill attended gravely. He maintained an air of conscientious impartiality.

"What do you think, Mr. Hauxhurst?" he asked.

The general manager had been listening to the stories with obvious boredom. He turned to Lee. "You registered Soomer in the book of prospects?"

Lee experienced once more the empty, caved-in feeling that was becoming so familiar to him these days.

"Why, no," he said. "No one uses that book to any extent, as far as——"

"That don't cut any ice," Hauxhurst decided curtly. "You knew there was such a book, and you knew what it was there for. Eberenz gets the commission."

O'Neill and Eberenz stood up and prepared to leave the office. Lee also arose, more slowly. He was conscious of a tingling, prickly sensation throughout his body, as if he had hold of a weak electric battery.

Suddenly all his grievous disappointment and indignation coagulated somewhere in his brain, and he found his speech.

"Why, that's a damned outrage!" he blurted. "Here I've worked for you all winter and almost frozen to death, and now you steal my first commission from me. What's more—you steal commissions right along—every time you get a chance. You get us suckers to slave for you, you keep us pumped full of hot air, then when we do make good, you rob us!"

The effect of this tirade was three-fold: Eberenz looked sullen; O'Neill's amphibious eyes opened wider than ever in positive alarm; but Hauxhurst turned pale with virulence.

The sales manager's whole notion was to hush up the noisy young salesman. "If you make a row, we'll call the police," he warned. "Perhaps we can split the commission some way——"

"Split nothing!" Hauxhurst took a step toward Lee. "You shut your mouth, and get out of here!"

Lee did not give way. Instead, he was wondering whether the conventionalities of such a situation demanded that he punch some one's face. He wanted above all to observe "good form"—to do what the code of masculine honor demanded.

But he contented himself with words: "You're a bunch of crooks!" he shot out. "And I'll get back at you for this if it takes ten years to do it!"

"Get out!" repeated Hauxhurst, but not quite so convincingly.

Lee gave his three antagonists a final defiant look and retreated from the room in good order. He ignored the curious stares of the few salesmen in the outer enclosure, picked up his hat and overcoat, and left the Security Realty Company's office forever.

He felt the elation of having conducted himself with *esprit*, of having behaved splendidly—"as a gentleman should." But presently the thrill of conflict seeped away, and in its place grew the despondent awareness that he was back just where he had been six months ago—without work, without definite plans.

His despondent progress home terminated in a joyful rebound when he discovered a letter from Vera. He glanced at the post-mark. The letter had been mailed Tuesday morning—before she could have received his letter, he reflected. In his eagerness he hardly noticed the weekly copy of the "Chatham Republican," addressed to him in his mother's handwriting. He sat down in the deserted room, and surrendered himself to the delight of Vera's message.

"MY DEAR LEE," she began. That sounded oddly formal. His eyes skimmed down the page. His right hand, which

was reflexively brushing his hair back from his forehead, stopped still.

"I hardly know how to write this letter. I hate to hurt your feelings. But I think you ought to know the truth. I don't love you. I think I must have been mistaken about it from the beginning.

"That's all. Please don't write me for any details, because there really isn't any use.

"Yours sincerely,

"VERA WAKEFIELD."

Presently he remembered to bring his right hand down from his forehead.

A throng of recollections rushed into his mind: Vera on Mount Phillis, that last Sunday afternoon; Vera's upturned face, infinitely tender in the darkness of innumerable summer nights; Vera's swimming eyes; Vera's smile with its shadowy suspicion of a dimple; Vera of a thousand appealing, heart-rending memories.

Automatically, he opened the "Chatham Republican." On the first page, his mother had blue-pencilled the following item:

"Mr. and Mrs. Roscoe Wakefield announced the engagement of their lovely daughter, Vera, to Milo Higginson, of Record, at a five-course supper last Saturday evening, given by Mrs. Wakefield to sixteen girl friends of her daughter."

There followed a vivid description of the ingenious method utilized to acquaint the guests with the great secret. Lee read on through the details of the "lavish refreshments" which featured the party.

"Miss Vera is popular, highly accomplished and beautiful, as a number of jilted Chatham swains will testify. More than once, Dame Rumor has whispered of the entanglement of her affections, but nothing ever come of it. Milo Higginson is the son of Jay Higginson, the well-known Record banker, and is a promising and rising young business man

on his own hook. The happy couple will be married early in April and will reside in Record. What is Chatham's loss is Record's gain!

"Congratulations, Milo!" * * * * *

"Al. Butler has gone back to work at the cheese factory——"

Lee dropped the paper to the floor and covered his eyes with his hands. Milo Higginson's inept, flabby face and gross, inert body rose in his memory. That was the perplexing climax to his agony. It was unbearable enough that Vera should stop loving him; but it was the thought of Milo Higginson's possessing her that nearly drove him insane. That lout, Vera's husband? Why, she couldn't love him—that was preposterous. She had made fun of him dozens of times. The obvious explanation slowly pieced itself together: Milo's money and Mrs. Wakefield's ambition had combined to do the trick. But Vera was a grown-up woman. She wasn't being forced into any marriage she didn't want. Besides, she no longer loved Lee. He guessed that she too had turned covetous eyes on his rival's prosperity.

Something of the blind, brutal power of money—the helplessness of poverty—seared itself into Lee's soul during those black moments.

He turned his head wearily, and stared unseeingly out of the window at the brick wall next door. What was wrong, he wondered. What sort of a world was it, anyway? He couldn't see the way clearly at all.

XI

THE first fortnight of March, 1908, brought little promise of spring. To Lee Hillquit, the weather seemed each day more piercingly cold, more malignantly inclement. There was a positive ferocity in the way the wind bit through his cravanette, as he pursued his mechanical course about the streets, vaguely looking for work.

Nothing paralyses the energies so irrevocably as uncertainty. Lee's intentions were as pathetically indefinite as they had been six months before. He had made no friends who could help him. He had acquired no expertness in the real estate business.

He began where he had left off: reading "want ads" in the comfortable stuffiness of the public library. Many vacancies clamored for the skilled workman. A few employers wanted sales managers, auditors, and the like, but always with the disheartening finale: "None but experienced men need apply." He noted the same old demand for men to become insurance solicitors, sales agents for "novelties," etc.; and there, in precisely the same old place, lay in wait the strenuous-sounding, mysteriously exhilarating advertisement of the Security Realty Company. "Only hustler need apply. Splendid opening for an ambitious, industrious man." It was a shrewdly framed appeal. Lee felt all over again his first quickened thrill.

At times he broke away from the enervating warmth of the library and wandered aimlessly about the downtown streets, as if he expected Opportunity, in some miraculous way, to swoop down upon him from the skies. And with

every day he was becoming moodier, more resentful toward life, more distrustful of people.

Early one sombre afternoon, he was picking his way through the slush on Washington boulevard when he heard some one shout his name.

He turned around in surprise. A small runabout wheezed up to the curb, and a young man with a trim black moustache and a dazzling grin peered out from the side curtains.

"Hello there, Lee!" he greeted warmly, and held out a wet gauntlet.

Lee couldn't help a smiling response. "Why, hello!" he returned. He racked his memory for identification of the cheerful youth.

"Which way you going?"

Lee parried the question. "I'm just out for exercise."

"Well, come on in—I'll give you a spin."

Lee wriggled in under the side curtains, and the runabout started up with considerable vibration and a vociferous coughing; then abruptly stopped.

"Stalled!" the grinning driver announced—without seeming to be in the least dampened by the circumstance. Nimble he clambered out, spun the motor, and hurried back into the car. This time, they succeeded in getting under way.

Lee had never been in an automobile before; the experience was a fascinating novelty.

"Maybe you don't remember me," suddenly began his companion. "My name's James—Ellwood James. You used to know me at the University when we were freshmen. I was a medic, and I finished my course here in Detroit. Dr. James—don't that sound funny?"

At that he threw back his head and laughed—an extraordinary, falsetto, frantic sort of laugh. Lee stared: it was the first real laugh he had heard in Detroit. He remembered Ellwood now. They had gone to the same boarding house. In those days, Ellwood had had the same white teeth, the

same "loud" cravats, the same suggestion of nervous energy—and most noticeable of all, the same odd eyebrows coming together over his nose in a little tuft that somehow lent him the aspect of a unicorn. The moustache alone was new.

He told Lee that he had been practising medicine for nine months and was associated with the city's most eminent surgeon. In addition, he was doing some sort of post-graduate work at one of the hospitals.

"You must have quite a practice already," Lee ventured, "to afford an automobile."

This seemed to tickle Ellwood's sensibilities enormously. "Hah—hah—hah!" exploded another of his strangulated laughs. "Why, my practice doesn't pay for my cravats—let alone gasoline. My old man bought me this when I graduated. He was *awful* proud of his little son, *awful* proud. I call her Lizzie, and she's *some* car!"

After his painful weeks of depressing struggle, Lee found Ellwood's gaiety irresistibly appealing.

"But say!" recollected Ellwood. "What are you doing in Detroit? And what's happened to you? You look awful seedy."

Lee pleaded hard work, but remained vague as to details. He was conscious, however, that his companion was genuinely interested in him. There was an indescribable warmth about Ellwood's attitude, a certain sympathy that was none the less grateful because it refused to be doleful.

He finally deposited his passenger at a downtown crossing. "I'll look you up sometime soon," he promised.

Lee remembered Fred Badger's promises, and was skeptical.

But Ellwood smoothed his close-cut moustache thoughtfully.

"What are you doing to-night?" he inquired.

"Not a thing," admitted Lee.

"Well, s'pose I pick you up about eight," suggested the

youthful physician. "Maybe we can stir up some excitement."

Ellwood and his runabout materialised promptly at the stipulated hour.

"I tried to frame up a date with a couple of girls," he set forth, "but there was nothing doing."

Lee was silent. After his experience with Vera, he was not anxious to meet any new girls. He fancied a certain dramatic satisfaction in becoming a woman-hater.

Meanwhile, under Ellwood's ministrations, "Lizzie" throbbed her way swiftly down Woodward avenue.

"I tell you," her owner suggested. "We might go to a burlesque show. They're awful frosts, but sort of fun at that."

Ellwood bought the tickets, and they found themselves in the tenth row of the theatre, listening to a "Grand Overture" by the brassy little orchestra. Nearly every seat was occupied. Already the air was heavily laden with the smoke from hundreds of cigars and cigarets.

"Big audience," commented Lee.

"Same every night," said his host. "Almost as many here every afternoon."

Lee glanced curiously at the faces about him. Every type of physiognomy had its representation. There were a great many workmen, he thought.

"I don't even know the name of the show," admitted Ellwood, fingering his programme. "'Dave Rose's Paris Queens,'" he read.

Lee's emotions were divided between pleasurable excitement and a conviction that he was doing something disreputable. He was relieved when the lights went down and the curtain rose on the opening chorus.

The show proved to be decidedly cheap entertainment. Those who had expected to behold something startlingly wicked must have been grievously disappointed. There was

the same old pair of Jewish comedians—the *sine qua non* of burlesque; the same peppery, polemic Irishman; the same old slap-stick. Even to a novice like Lee, the jokes seemed flat; he was astonished to note the hilarious mirth of the audience.

There were just two "acts" that promised anything sensational. The first was "La Zara, the Oriental Dancer." But La Zara proved fat and clumsy—anything but seductive. The second act was billed as "Living Statuary, by Members of the Chorus." The curtains parted on some twelve girls, attired in flesh-colored tights, each holding some "artistic" pose till the folds of the curtain fell again. There were some six scenes. Meanwhile the Jew comedians stood in the wings and "made cracks" about the girls.

It was the show's nearest approach to alluring wickedness. The audience sat absolutely quiet. Each man seemed abashed, almost timid, at the spectacle. Even the comedians' crass jokes brought no response.

Lee tried to revel in the scene, but he soon found himself feeling sorry for the girls. They looked uncomfortable. One, especially, seemed to find no pleasure in her work. She was a large girl with a nice expression; her place was at the rear in the centre. She seemed a little ungainly in her postures, Lee remarked.

At last the performance dragged its banal way to a conclusion.

"We might buy ourselves some chop suey," suggested Ellwood, as they paused irresolutely outside the theatre. Forthwith, he led the way up a narrow flight of stairs to Yen Lo's "Chinese Gardens."

A few minutes afterward, Lee saw two girls come up the stairway and sit down at a nearby table.

"By George!" he suddenly recognised. "There are two chorus girls from the show." One of them, he felt sure, was the nice-looking tall girl.

Ellwood cast an expert eye over the two "Paris Queens." "Shall we pick 'em up?" he asked.

Lee's eyes opened wide. "You don't know them, do you?"

"Know them?" Ellwood almost choked. "Don't have to know them. This isn't Jefferson avenue. Watch me."

He walked over to the table, and without the slightest hesitation began talking to the two girls quite as if he had always known them. In a moment he motioned to Lee to join him.

"This is Miss Diamond," he introduced, indicating a small, light-haired girl. "And Miss Kohler." He nodded in the direction of the tall girl.

With no little uneasiness, Lee sat down. He wondered how one conducted one's self with women of this type. But under Ellwood's lead, the conversation proceeded with amazing ease. Lee found opportunity to check up his first impressions of Miss Bernice Kohler. She really was nice-looking. Her hazel eyes were fine; the delicious quality of her voice made him forget her outrageous grammar. In her neat blue tailored suit, she revealed none of her stage awkwardness. Her hands were too large, admittedly; but even this defect somehow suggested honesty.

Ellwood soon indicated a preference for Miss June Diamond's piquant blondness, and Lee was free to investigate this startling social phenomenon in the shape of an apparently "nice" burlesque girl. To his surprise, she actually liked her life. She professed no especial repugnance even toward the "Living Statuary" act.

"It's just a part of the business," she explained. "It don't mean nothing to me."

She had been on the burlesque circuit for two years, she told him, and showed him a telegram.

"See this," she said, and Lee read a meaningless message from New York City. "That means I'll be on Broadway next season."

She was very curious to know what Lee thought of the "Paris Queens," and asked him if he intended to see the performance on Friday night.

"That's Chorus Girl Night," she set forth. "Each one of us girls does some stunt, and the one the audience likes best wins a prize of ten dollars. I won it last week in Cleveland."

Lee was by now completely reassured. "That's fine! We'll try to be there."

It was after midnight when the four of them left the "Chinese Gardens."

Ellwood took Lee aside. "My 'bus only holds two," he explained. "Would you mind if Fluffy-fluff and I ditched you two here?"

"Not a bit," said Lee; and presently, he found himself alone with Bernice.

"Where do you live?" he asked her. She gave him the name of a cheap downtown hotel, and they started walking.

Bernice seemed troubled. "I'm awfully worried about June," she suddenly announced. "I tried to keep her from going off alone with your friend."

"Oh, she's perfectly safe with Ellwood," Lee hastened to say. He couldn't help patting her arm a little.

But Bernice remained skeptical. "I know men," she asserted with great conviction. "There ain't many I'd trust."

They reached her hotel. "Well, good-bye," she said, and smiled once more. "I'm awful glad I met you."

"But won't I see you Friday after the show?"

She looked wistful. "If you really want to. You can wait for me in the alley outside the stage door."

The next night, Ellwood reappeared at Lee's rooms. "Say, you aren't sore, are you?" he asked. "I didn't mean to invite you out to a party and then let you walk home alone."

Lee reassured him.

"It's the women that always make a fool of me," Ellwood set forth with rueful glee. "How'd you make out?"

"I think Bernice is a wonder," said Lee with conviction. "One of the decenter girls I've ever met."

Ellwood looked as if he wanted to laugh. "Don't let 'em kid you that way. I s'pose you believed her even when she said she sent all her money home to mother? June's a cute kid, though," he went on. "Are you going again Friday?"

He proposed that they secure seats in the first row, so that they could "boost for the girls." "We don't have to get there till late," he explained. "I don't want to listen to all that rot again."

They arrived Friday night in time for the last act of the show. Lee felt a definite glow of pride when Bernice threw him a cautious smile of welcome. It seemed to give him a certain superiority over the rest of the spectators.

In due time the final curtain descended, and the stage manager appeared, looking pale and flabby in the glare of the footlights.

"Gentlemen," he began nervously, "the management takes great pleasure in announcing a Chorus Girls' Contest this evening. This contest is open to any girl in our company. Each contestant will do an act. When they are through the audience will choose the winner. First prize is ten dollars, second prize, five dollars." He withdrew deprecatingly.

The orchestra struck up, and a chorus girl in natty white coat and trousers advanced to the centre of the stage. Hers was a "song-and-dance act." She sang in a weak, colorless voice, but her dancing possessed an attractive pertness and she won considerable applause.

There followed six other chorus girls, whose acts covered a wide range of endeavor. Two "clogged"; and one unfortunate girl who essayed to give "imitashuns" of leading stage celebrities, was booed from the stage before she had

gotten fairly started. Each act drew frank comments from the audience.

"Work hard, kid!" "Some shape!" "Get the hook!"

Lee found himself in a state of nervous tension. He wondered what sort of a reception Bernice Kohler would get. He hated to think of her being insulted by these rowdies.

The orchestra attacked still another tune, and this time it was Bernice who tripped lightly out from the wings. Lee took a sharp inhalation of breath. She was wearing her dark blue street suit. Save for a light make-up, she looked precisely as she had three nights before. But her grace and her perfect self-assurance!

Bernice's song proved to be "Does Your Mother Know You're Out, Little Girl?" She attempted no dancing—simply sang, with an occasional gesture or movement of her head. Her voice was thoroughly pleasant, and her facial expressions eloquent. At intervals she smiled down at Lee.

The audience seemed very quiet, it occurred to him. He hadn't heard a single audible comment. What was the difference between the other girls and Bernice? Could it possibly be that everybody else in the theatre sensed the appeal of her shining goodness?

She finished the song, gave a quick curtsy, and disappeared in the wings.

The whole house applauded wildly. Bernice had to repeat the chorus twice before the demonstration died away.

The Stage Manager announced that the contest was over.

"Wonder what's happened to June," said Ellwood.

Each one of the performers now walked out on the stage, and the audience indicated her popularity by the amount of its applause. When Bernice reappeared, a second demonstration ensued. None of the other contestants elicited half the tumult of her welcome. Thereupon the stage

manager proclaimed her the winner, and with elaborate ceremony presented her with a ten-dollar gold piece. Lee's pride in his acquaintance with her waxed enormous.

"She's all right," granted Ellwood, as they filed out of the theatre. "I didn't think she had it in her."

Outside a cold rain had set in. They turned up their overcoat collars—Lee's cravanette at last justified its existence—and repaired to the alley outside the stage door.

Presently June Diamond emerged from the mysterious domain beyond the door. She ran eagerly up to Ellwood.

"Were you s'prised I didn't come on for the contest?" she importuned. "Well, I would've, only my costum didn't get back from the cleaners. You ought-a see it—it's swell!"

"That's a fine stall!" laughed Ellwood. "I'll bet you had cold feet."

For the first time she became aware of Lee. "Oh say!" she told him, "Bernice has a date with Dave Rosenberger to-night."

Lee's spirits sank dismally. "Dave *who*?" he contrived to ask.

"Rosenberger. The owner of the show. Calls himself Dave Rose, for short. Bernice tried to duck it, and couldn't. But she says to me, 'Tell Mr. Hillquit to meet me at the hotel an hour from now. I'll break away from Rose as soon's I can.'"

Ellwood suggested that the three of them go to the Chop Suey Gardens in the meantime. But it was readily apparent that June wanted Ellwood all to herself, and Lee hadn't the heart to accept the invitation.

"I'll bring Bernice there as soon as I meet her," he said.

He watched them start gaily forth in Ellwood's run-about, then began a long walk through the rain. He wondered if Bernice would really meet him. Perhaps she had sent him that message merely to get him out of the way. He had heard tales of how chorus girls delighted to "string

stage-door mashers." What did Rosenberger want with her, anyway?

By half-past eleven, he was pacing anxiously up and down in the vicinity of the cheap hotel. During his six months in Detroit, he had smoked hardly at all, but tonight he lighted cigaret after cigaret.

After fifteen minutes he saw Bernice and her short, obese escort approaching. Hurriedly he crossed the street. He thought Bernice observed him clandestinely as they passed by. She left the owner of the "Paris Queens" at the door.

"Mr. Rose, for short," was maddeningly deliberate about taking himself off. He paused on the street corner, lighted a cigar, and ever and anon looked back into the hotel.

But at last he boarded a street car. And then—at last—Bernice appeared again from the elevator and walked quickly out into the street. She seemed all aglow with excitement. Her eyes shone.

"Has he gone?" she asked breathlessly. "I thought I never could get rid of him."

They set out briskly for the chop suey emporium. Lee's blood tingled. Here was adventure, excitement, a persistent sense of delicious wickedness.

"What did Mr. Rose want?" he inquired.

Bernice tossed her head lightly. "Oh, about once a week he thinks he's got to make love to me. Always starts out tellin' me how much he's goin' to do for me on the stage, an' ends up by gettin' silly about my eyes. But he's the least of my worries."

There was no sign of June Diamond and Ellwood in the garishly decorated "Gardens," and Bernice collapsed into a chair despondently.

"She never intended to be here, and I oughn't to have left her out of my sight a minute." Real anxiety came into her candid eyes. "She's such a crazy little thing. I have to keep my eyes on her all the time. That's my job."

He endeavored to reassure her once more about Ellwood.

"No, you're wrong," disagreed Bernice. "I said the other night I didn't trust your friend; and from what June told me about him, I know I got him sized up right. The only thing in life that interests him is havin' a good time—excitement. Any girl's fair game to him."

"Ellwood's not as bad as all that," remonstrated Lee. "He's mighty kind-hearted and generous. He may be thoughtless, but——"

"What difference does that make," she interrupted almost fiercely, "as long as he does such rotten things?" She softened a little. "Course I know he's your friend, but all the same, fellows like that always get my goat. They don't see our side of it at all." Suddenly she smiled and her voice regained its charming quality. "Anyhow, you're not that way."

They both ordered beer, and a moment later, Lee asked her the old, old question that every youth propounds to his first chorus-girl acquaintance.

"Aren't there a lot of temptations on the stage? Can a girl stay good?"

Bernice laughed. "Why, sure she can. Being in the chorus ain't much different than being anywhere else. The only thing is—you're away from home." She took a sip of beer, and Lee noticed again the patent honesty of those large, rough hands of hers. "That old idea about chorus girls is all wrong—take it from me. They're just as good as any other girls, an' they have a lot more ambition. They're more interestin'. You see, they're the ones who ain't satisfied t' stay home an' wash dishes. Something in 'em makes 'em want t' get out in the world an' make their own livin'. They're more self-reliant. They've got more personality." She was silent an instant. "Of course, it's different with the stars. I bet there ain't more'n one star actress in a dozen that don't have t' pay the price."

One bottle of beer sufficed for Bernice; all too soon, she announced that they must go. Both of them were sorry when the half-extinguished lights of the hotel loomed up through the cold drizzle. By common consent, they walked past the entrance, and finally came to an irresolute pause in a darkened doorway. The wet streets were entirely deserted; the asphalt pavement glistened coldly.

"Am I going to see you again?" said Lee.

"I wish you could, but to-morrow night, we all have t' rush right down to the train for Chicago, an' I don't s'pose we'd have any chance t' talk."

"Well, I guess it's good-bye, then." He started to tell her how good she was and how glad he was to know her. "I wish you lots of good luck, and I expect you'll be on Broadway sure next year."

The light from the arc lamp fell on her face. There was something in her eyes that made him breathe faster—something tender, Madonna-like.

All at once, as if by common desire, they kissed each other.

"Good-bye," she whispered. "You're an awful decent fellow."

XII

LEE found it difficult to take Ellwood James to task. The irrepressible young physician opened alluring avenues of novel entertainment. He was "good company"; he offered an escape from the corrosion of loneliness. He afforded exactly the proper antidote for Lee's growing pessimism. More than that, Lee really liked him. There was an undercurrent of sincerity, of warmth, of human kindness, about him. It was evident that he had detected Lee's despondency and wanted to cheer him up. Lee hesitated to risk the loss of such an attractive friendship.

Nevertheless, so moved had he been by Bernice Kohler's unhappiness over June Diamond, that he resolutely approached what he considered his duty.

Ellwood listened to his homily on the single standard of morality with poorly concealed amusement.

"You know almost as much about women as the man in the moon," he finally retorted. "The funny part of it is, you're really sincere."

This hardly sounded repentant. "Of course I'm sincere, and I'm right, too," Lee affirmed.

Ellwood's cheerful features actually became grave as he shook his head.

"No, you're wrong—and it's hard to believe you're as innocent as you seem. And yet every fellow starts out that way—respecting women, putting them up on a pedestal. That's what we were taught at home. It's only when we've lived out in the world awhile that we find out all our dope about women was wrong—just a myth."

Ellwood stopped his runabout to roll a cigaret. Instead of starting again, he shut off the motor. Lee was startled by a sudden look of pain in his eyes.

"I used to feel the same as you. I don't mind telling you I was awfully in love about two years ago—with a nice girl, I mean. I did the pedestal stuff myself. Why, honestly, Lee, I wouldn't have any more thought of even touching that girl than I would of—say, of hitting my mother with my fist. I wanted to marry her. She made me feel I was terribly unworthy of her, and that she didn't think any too much of me. Well, one night, a beastly little roughneck goes up to call on her. His first call. None of the pedestal stuff for him. Before the evening's half gone, he up and kisses her—loves her up. I got it all straight from him afterwards—the damned cad! Was the girl insulted? Did she call her father or brother, and have the roughneck kicked out? I should say not. She fell for him hard. Thought he was the finest man she'd ever seen. He said she used to pester him to death calling him on the 'phone.

"And that's another queer thing: when a man turns a girl down, all the women call him a brute; but when a girl jilts a man, everybody thinks it kind of a joke."

Ellwood's cigaret glowed with the vehemence of his puffing. "I've talked with a good many fellows about it, and nearly every one has had the same experience. Well, that little affair taught me something, Lee. First of all, never to take any woman seriously. The man who's in love is always at a disadvantage. Sex is just a warfare; if you don't get the upper hand, the woman will—and the minute she has it, she doesn't give a snap of her finger for you any more. Respect, adoration—bosh! They just bore a woman to tears. What she wants above all things is a man who won't knuckle down to her. Every girl I've ever been really nice to—highminded, considerate, you know—

has handed me a dirty deal in the end; but the girls I'm rotten to seem to think I'm some boy! It's funny, I know, but it's the truth and you'll find it out."

Lee was silent. He was thinking of his experience with Vera. It was startlingly like Ellwood's affair.

"Still, that doesn't excuse a man for really harming a girl," he insisted.

Ellwood laughed, and cranked the motor into action. "Well, you're right, I s'pose. I doubt if I've ever harmed any of 'em very much, and yet I'm what you'd call an immoral youth. Most girls are a lot wiser than you think; they know what they're doing every minute. All this sob-stuff about 'ruining girls' is largely imaginary. But I make it a point to play pretty fair with them. I have just two rules: I never tell a girl I love her; and I never break a girl in."

"You may not actually say you love them," Lee distinguished, "but you certainly make them think you do. June Diamond thought you were crazy about her."

"Well, I can't help acting the way I feel," protested the amorous doctor. "I'm able to love almost any girl till I've landed her. After that, they're all alike." His pause had a reminiscent flavor. "You don't understand, Lee. It isn't the physical part that appeals to me. It's the excitement, the suspense—and a lot of vanity, too, I s'pose."

Lee had a sudden feeling of antipathy. "I can't see the sport in it. I believe a man should stay clean."

"That's a nasty way of putting it," said Ellwood after a moment. "I used to think of everything as good or bad; but now I classify them as interesting or boring. And almost everything bores me—after about so long—except women. They're inconsistent, deceitful, spiteful; and yet every new girl is an absolute novelty to me. Of course, I know way down in my heart that she's just like all the rest, and I'll be awfully sick of her later on; but when I

first meet her, she seems different from any other girl I've ever seen."

Lee persisted in his disapprobation, so emphatically, indeed, that he saw no more of Ellwood for several weeks. Meanwhile he had been continuing his despondent half-hearted search for work. Every day he found some excuse for spending several hours in the unventilated warmth of the library reading room. He left his name with three employment agents, but they shook their heads pessimistically over his admission that he had no profession or trade.

His mother's letters now became more insistent upon his return to Chatham. "I've been feeling poorly the last few weeks," she wrote, "and I simply can't seem to make ends meet." This meant but one thing: he must either find employment at once or go back to Chatham, an acknowledged failure.

March went out like a lion; and Lee, walking day by day through the slush, finally succumbed to a bad attack of influenza. He was confined to his bed for an entire week, with no medical attendance save the inexperienced ministrations of Mrs. Holmes. Bob Hamilton wanted to telephone Ellwood James, but Lee petulantly forbade it.

During these long days of acute physical discomfort, his small residuum of courage completed evaporated.

Late one windy afternoon, he emerged shakily upon the street. The loneliness of the rooms was unbearable. The air might do him good, he thought.

He looked dismally up and down Cass avenue. Within a day or two, he would be saying good-bye to the city for good. He had given up all hope of getting work. He must face the mediocrity, the knowing grins, the whispered gossip of Chatham. He started slowly up the street. Never before had he felt so desolate, so forlorn, so poverty-stricken. Presently he turned a corner and walked aimlessly westward.

All at once he visualised Mrs. Wakefield, a triumphant look on her face, saying to Vera, "Didn't I tell you so?"

A splendid limousine sped swiftly past. How wonderful it must be, he reflected, never to have to worry about money, to possess everything one wanted in life. It must give one a sense of absolute freedom. Poverty was stifling, suffocating.

He hardly observed that the limousine had slackened and stopped a few rods down the street. As he came abreast of it, he heard his name pronounced. He turned in great surprise, and saw that a woman in the limousine had opened the door and was nodding to him in evident recognition. He lifted his hat uncertainly, and had taken a couple of steps toward the curb before he recognised Mrs. Curran.

"I thought it was you, so I stopped—just on impulse." She smiled at him in friendly fashion, and his forlorn spirit warmed gratefully toward her. "Where are you going? Can't I give you a lift?"

The interior of the limousine looked marvellously inviting. Lee explained that he had been ill and was walking aimlessly.

"You poor boy!" Mrs Curran sympathised. "I wish I had known. But come in anyway. A ride will do you good."

Lee temporized no further and entered the limousine with a feeling of pleasant anticipation. The cushioned seat received his body with a soft luxuriousness. The limousine gathered headway smoothly, glided along with swift ease.

Mrs. Curran, with occasional swift glances, was taking in his whole appearance: his attenuated, pale face with its lines of distinction; his shy, sensitive eyes; his seedy-looking cravanette and trousers, noticeably frayed at the edges. An idea, half kindly, half capricious, came to her.

"You must come home and have dinner with me," she announced quite as if the matter were thereby settled. "I'll send you back to your house afterwards in the car."

Frankly the prospect seemed Elysian to Lee. His present taste of luxury was like an intoxicant to him. But he thought it good manners to hesitate.

"Won't it inconvenience you at all?" he asked.

"Not a bit," she assured him. "I had expected to go out for dinner, but at the last moment, my hostess postponed."

Mrs. Curran professed two short business errands before dinner, and they drove downtown. While she was absent, Lee sat back and closed his eyes for a moment. It all seemed indescribably blissful. Hundreds of people hurried by on their way home. The cold April wind still blew ferociously, and women's dresses and men's overcoats flapped in wild abandon. Many of these wayfarers cast envious glances at Lee, seated snugly in the limousine's shelter. Doubtless they believed that he owned this resplendent car, that he was a wealthy "Society man." Lee was never beyond posing just a little; and he now assumed a convincing attitude of haughty boredom.

At length the limousine drew up in front of a large house of stone and brick, designed after the grand manner of the late 'eighties. Wells street boasted two solid blocks of just such mansions, set far back from the sidewalk behind expansive lawns. But for all its impressiveness, the street had begun to lose its brisk spick-and-spanness. The first touches of senility seemed to have settled down like mildew over the old houses.

To Lee, however, Mrs. Curran's home appeared entirely majestic. Inside, the staircase ran up from the left side of the hallway; and on either side opened out spacious rooms with lofty ceilings. Mrs. Curran had dispensed with most of the earlier decorations and fixtures. The gaudy old chandeliers had long since given way to modern electric light wall-brackets—though she still favored a few inviting-looking kerosene table-lamps. The highly ornate walls and

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dingy, gingerbread frescoes had yielded to severely plain wallpaper and calcimine, relieved by a few very good pictures. The dining room and drawing room were richly sombre in mahogany panelling.

Mrs. Curran led him into the drawing room, where a crackling log fire filled an enormous grate.

"This hearth is the one thing I really love about the place," she explained.

Lee expressed admiration for the whole house.

"Perhaps you wouldn't feel so, if you had lived here twenty years. No, it's getting pretty old and inconvenient, and the neighborhood is beginning to break up. The Jews and rooming houses are starting to come in, and that always means the finish of a good residence district. I suppose in another year, I'll have to build, out on the East Side somewhere."

Mrs. Curran excused herself, and Lee sat down on the great red davenport in front of the fire. He found himself admiring Mrs. Curran intensely. He couldn't help remarking her delightful enunciation, her poise, her ease of manner, her apparent freedom from affectation. He had expected that a "Society woman," such as she, would maintain an air of aloof formality. But Mrs. Curran talked and acted like any other human being; and yet he sensed an indefinable superiority—a polish, a *savoir faire*, perhaps—that compelled his unstinted worship. There was a certain charm about her, too—in spite of her utter lack of beauty. Even in the freshness of her youth, she couldn't have been at all pretty. Her mouth was too large, and her dominating black eyes slanted slightly upwards toward her temples, in a sensuous sort of way. Her prominent cheek-bones, taken in connection with her eyes, gave her face a distinctly Mongolian suggestion. Nevertheless, she did possess a certain attractiveness, a certain distinct magnetism.

To Lee, it seemed akin to a miracle that he should be

sitting in this beautiful house, the dinner-guest of a charming and distinguished woman. Two hours ago, he had been wandering wretchedly about the streets. There was such a thing as human kindness after all. He felt that he would do anything in the world for Mrs. Curran to show his deep appreciation.

His evening proved wholly delightful. Mrs. Curran was more wonderful than ever in an evening gown. The dinner itself seemed an undreamt-of feast, especially after the meager mediocrity of the boarding house. The radiantly white napery, the scintillating glass-ware, the deft, deferential maid, the pervading atmosphere of wealth and refinement: all made their sharp impression on his imagination. To be sure, he felt ashamed of his clothing—he had particular trouble with a shirt cuff that was positively ragged; and he was under the constant dread of using the wrong knife and fork.

Gradually his self-consciousness melted away under the unmistakable kindness of his hostess. Mrs. Curran talked along easily—about superficial things for the most part, but always in a way that commanded his interest. Her manner indicated that she found his opinions of considerable weight. Then subtly she began to draw him out. Lee, of course, failed to realise the manipulation. He only knew that a desire for self-expression came over him. Before long he had told her about Vera, about his bitter experiences in the real estate business; how discouraged he was.

"All the same, I still feel sometimes that I'm going to accomplish fine things in life," he said. "I feel that way to-night."

Then Mrs. Curran made an odd remark. They were back in the drawing room, in front of the fire.

"How your eyes shine!"

It seemed to Lee that his ardent flow of thought was somewhat checked.

"Pardon me—I didn't mean to sound personal," said his hostess quickly. "It was such a curious reflection of the light that I couldn't help noticing it."

"I understand perfectly," assured Lee.

Mrs. Curran looked into the fire thoughtfully. "I can't see why you should be discouraged. You're well educated; you have a good personality. You've just had bad luck."

Lee suffered a reaction. "All the same, I'm afraid I'll have to go back home. I can't find anything to do in Detroit."

"Would you like to go into our department store?" she inquired casually. "I think I could arrange an opening for you very readily. I'm convinced you could make good."

He must have looked his eager assent, for she continued: "I'll call up Mr. Jameson, the employment manager, tomorrow morning. Suppose you telephone me at noon. I can tell you something definite by that time."

Lee found it difficult to express his gratitude.

"That's perfectly all right," Mrs. Curran said. "Nothing gives me more pleasure than helping young men of the right sort."

A little later, when he rose to go, Mrs. Curran insisted on summoning the limousine.

"I want you to watch that cold of yours," she enjoined him. "You musn't think of starting to work for another week or two."

"I've never felt so well in my life," Lee protested. "And it's all due to your kindness."

Mrs. Curran extended her hand graciously. "It's been an unexpectedly pleasant evening for me, too. Won't you come again soon?"

She seemed almost diffident about inviting him—much as though she expected him to refuse.

"Do you really mean you want me to?" asked Lee ingenuously.

She smiled and nodded.

"Then I certainly shall come again—soon," he announced with gravity.

Good fortune, it seemed, had at last begun to veer in his direction. The next day after an interminably long morning, he telephoned Mrs. Curran.

"I had a talk with Mr. Jameson this morning," she announced.

"Oh, yes—the employment manager," he said in a very small, matter-of-fact voice.

"He thinks he can start you either as a floor-walker or window-dresser. Of course, that may not sound very attractive, but it's a part of the Curran policy never to take a man into the office until he's spent some time in the store." She seemed half-apologetic.

Lee's exultation made him almost inarticulate. "It sounds splendid to me!" he managed to say. "I can't tell you how I appreciate it."

"I told Mr. Jameson you'd drop in and talk over details with him as soon as you were feeling well enough," went on Mrs. Curran. "Also, that you weren't to be allowed to do any work until Monday at least. Good luck to you! Come and tell me how you like it."

He thanked her fervently, said good-bye and hung up the receiver. Inside his room, he clenched his fists, shut his teeth hard. Tears came into his eyes. Shock after shock of happiness passed through his body. Yet six months before he would have scoffed contemptuously at an opportunity to work in a department store.

He determined to call upon Mr. Jameson at once. He was already familiar with the imposing Woodward avenue façade of the Curran establishment.

Mr. Jameson proved to be a crisp, efficient individual of forty with a wide, close-clipped moustache and gleaming eye-glasses.

"I am Mr. Hillquit," announced Lee in his usual respectful way.

"Who?" The employment manager continued to eye his visitor implacably.

"Mr. Hillquit. Didn't Mrs. Curran——"

It seemed a magic name. Mr. Jameson softened perceptibly. It might be said that a certain faint humorousness crept into his manner.

"Oh!" he recollected. "You're Mrs. Curran's protégé."

The description hardly seemed accurate, but Lee nodded.

Mr. Jameson made a number of memoranda regarding his visitor's lack of qualifications.

"I think there are only two openings that would interest a man of your stamp," concluded the employment manager. Lee had a more definite impression of sly playfulness in Mr. Jameson's words. "Which would you prefer being—a floor-walker or a window-dresser?"

Lee had an impulse to ask which work offered the more salary, but he thought another line of inquiry might impress Mr. Jameson more favorably.

"Which job gives me the better opportunity to show what I can do?"

The employment manager's eyes opened in astonishment. "Either one's all right to start on, and they pay the same."

Lee reflected. If there was really no choice between the two positions, he instinctively preferred the less conspicuous.

"I think I'd like to try window-dressing."

"All right, sir. You can report Monday morning at a quarter before eight. Your salary will start at twenty-five dollars."

Lee couldn't see the humor of the situation, as Mr. Jameson evidently did; but he thanked the employment manager and took his leave.

Twenty-five dollars a week! He walked elatedly out into the street. Once more he felt like a god among the hun-

dreds of pedestrians that surrounded him. Twenty-four hours ago, he had been in the deepest morasses of despair, had planned to give up the fight and go home. How proud his mother would be when she read his next letter. He felt his self-respect come surging back as he reflected that his days of dependence on her were at an end.

Twenty-five dollars a week! From long habit, he began to consider the possibility of marrying Vera on that salary. Then he closed his jaws together angrily. "I'll show 'em yet," he promised himself.

All at once, he found himself thinking once more of Mrs. Curran—deeply moved by her kindness to him and her evident appreciation of his potentialities—paying tribute more unreservedly than ever to her perfect poise, her delicious accent, her subtle, magnetic, personal charm.

XIII

THE department store of Curran & Company, in which Lee Hillquit began work the following Monday morning, was in the year 1908 the second largest institution of the kind in Detroit. It occupied a massive six-story brick building on a prominent downtown Woodward avenue corner; within its spacious confines you could purchase anything from shoe laces to a five hundred dollar gown, from a twenty-five cent stool to a thousand dollar grand piano, from cotton to silk—anything, in fact, except groceries.

Such imposing proportions, as Lee learned later, had grown gradually from the humblest beginnings. Joe Curran, an Irish immigrant, had come to Detroit in the early 'seventies, and found employment as a general handy man and porter in a clothing store on lower Woodward avenue. Ambitious, ingenious, he had painfully acquired a business education. Presently he was a salesman, then chief buyer, then general manager. In the 'eighties, the clothing store had failed, and from its ruins rose a new establishment under the name of Curran & Company.

Long before this, Joe Curran had brought over, first Tom Curran, then Michael Curran; and he now made his younger brothers equal partners in the profitable and growing establishment. The three brothers, red-faced, rough-spoken, generous, were familiar characters on the streets of the city in those earlier days. Their increasing prosperity changed them not one whit. They remained real Irishmen—relentlessly hostile to their enemies, loyal to their friends and to each other.

Yet the three, so alike in many things, possessed widely divergent characteristics. Joe Curran, always fond of his glass of whisky, became moodier and drank harder as he grew older; Michael Curran, who had the best head for business of the three, developed into that rarity, an acquisitive Irishman; Tom Curran, the youngest brother, was the dreamer of the trio—gentle, visionary, in spite of his ruddy, bluff exterior. Joe and Tom both married; Michael remained a bachelor.

In 1890, the brothers took over a bankrupt dry goods stock. That was the haphazard beginning of the department store idea. Soon they had joined the two businesses under one roof, and had added a small department for women's shirt-waists and ready-made dresses. The panic of 1893 caught them unaware in the midst of this expansion, and after a long struggle, they succumbed to a receivership. The creditors were ultimately paid fifty cents on the dollar.

But the Curran boys were not so easily disposed of. Within six months, they had started up again in a small way. The wholesalers liked them, had faith in their integrity. By 1898, the business was more prosperous than ever, and the brothers had paid back every penny of their receivership debts.

But the anxieties of business and his growing intimacy with Irish whisky had undermined Joe Curran's health, and he died very suddenly, just after the store had moved into its present quarters. Within the year, Tom Curran, never so rugged as his brothers, had followed his older brother to the grave. Joe Curran was survived by a son and daughter; Tom Curran, whose marriage had been childless, left Lee's benefactress as his only heir.

The business, nevertheless, kept on growing under Michael Curran's sole dictatorship. In 1901, two more stories were added to the building; and at the time that Lee began work, the most pressing problem was lack of room. The three

acres of floor space were so crowded with merchandise that no department could expand without seriously cramping its neighbor. Over a thousand employ  s swarmed the six floors and basement. Twenty-five thousand people came into the store each day. The gross sales for the year 1907 had been in excess of four million dollars.

Lee reported to Mr. Jameson promptly at a quarter before eight on Monday morning.

"I'll introduce you to Mr. Doman, the advertising manager," said Mr. Jameson. "You'll be under his supervision."

Howard Doman, Curran & Company's advertising manager, impressed and attracted Lee at one and the same time. He was a tremendous figure of a man, six feet tall, and easily over two hundred pounds in weight. His face was round, and he was partly bald. Physical vitality cropped out all over him. But what rescued his expression from a near-grossness—what really arrested Lee and imbued in him an instant loyalty—was the advertising manager's eyes. They were not the usual cock-sure, combative, cynical eyes that Lee had grown so accustomed to. They were imaginative, perceptive, inquiring eyes—above all, inquiring. Doman looked at Lee as if he had never before beheld a human being. In the years of close association between the two, Lee never saw the advertising man lose that perpetual look of captivated interest, of fine curiosity.

Jameson left the advertising office, and Lee, at his superior's suggestion, sat down. For another moment, Doman seemed to be studying his new employ  .

"Mrs. Curran seems to think you have the sort of qualities that fit you for work in my department," he began. "Do you think you'd like it?"

"I don't know very much about any of the departments," confessed Lee.

"Well, you look as though you had brains," pronounced Doman, then abruptly smiled.

Lee warmed to the smile. He liked Doman's white, evenly spaced teeth. More than that, he felt the attraction of the manager's radiating ability.

"I'd be awfully glad to have you give me a try-out," he said.

Doman gave him a concise statement of the modern theory of merchandising. As he talked he made cryptic diagrams on a pad of blank paper on his desk.

"Fifteen years ago, there was no such thing as a fixed price for anything. The salesman sized up his customer and got as high a price as he could. The department store has changed all that. Every article on sale in this institution has a tag on it, with the price printed in plain figures.

"The big idea of the modern store is not the amount of profit on each article, but the volume of business. The goal toward which every single man and woman is working is to keep the stock moving every minute. We used to order enough stock to keep us going six months. To-day the idea is to keep as little stock as possible, to order every week, to make as many 'turn-overs' as we can during the year. If a certain line doesn't go as fast as it should, we have a bargain day, and sell it at a loss. Anything to get rid of it. D' you see—big sales, low profits."

Lee nodded.

Each department, Doman went on, was a separate unit, yet interdependent on every other department. Each department had its separate buyer—who was its exclusive manager, within certain limits—its assistant buyer, its stock clerk and its salesmen or saleswomen. At the beginning of the year, each department was allowed so much capital for its purchases, and charged with its fair proportion of rent, lighting, heating, delivery service and other expenses. Its sales had to make a showing of a certain definite profit of about seven per cent. Every department fixed its prices to ensure this same percentage. The piano department, for

example, had to secure a much higher gross profit on each sale than the notions department, because the piano stock couldn't be "turned over" one-twentieth as rapidly as the stock of notions. There was an elaborate checking system that enabled the heads of the business to ascertain the exact amount of the sales and the condition of the stock every day.

The organisation of the business was somewhat complex, yet every man knew definitely what was expected of him. Michael Curran was the active head of the business. His was the final decision in all matters of importance. He supervised the buying and selling—indeed, he still did some of the buying of men's clothes. He fixed the prices. He moulded the store's general policy, gave it its distinctive individuality. Thus the Curran department store had come to stand in the public's mind for medium-priced merchandise. One could purchase expensive things and cheap things over its counters; but, generally speaking, its customers were from the great middle class of the city.

Directly responsible to Mr. Curran were all of the buyers of the various departments, and certain other administrative heads—among them the advertising manager.

Doman tore off the top sheet of his desk-pad, and started making fantastic diagrams anew.

"Of all the departments, I think ours is by far the most interesting. I said a little while ago that our whole problem was to keep the goods moving fast, to build up the volume of sales. How's that to be accomplished? In several ways, of course—giving good value, dealing honestly with people, having good salesmen and an attractive stock of goods. But most important of all—the motor that pumps life through the whole organisation—is the advertising department. Advertising is essential enough in every business; in department stores, it's the Big Noise. It's what makes the wheels go round. Mr. Curran pays more for advertising than for

anything else in the store—except of course his stock of goods and his pay-roll. What d' you suppose we paid the Detroit newspapers in 1907?"

Lee confessed complete nescience.

"Over one hundred thousand dollars. Think of it! Between two and three per cent. of the gross sales. Some stores pay more, some less. Do you get the significance of it? One hundred thousand dollars to appeal to people's imaginations, to arouse in their minds a craving to buy something. Think of the psychology of it! And if I could give you only one piece of advice, it would be this: never lose sight of the tremendous romance, the curious thrill, of advertising. It's the most absorbing artistic endeavor that a man may pursue."

Lee was leaning forward eagerly. "Yes, I get just an inkling of what it means. I'd never thought of business that way."

"Window-displays are in my department—they're a form of advertising," continued Doman. "A mighty important form, too. Thousands of people pass the store every day. Lots of them never read newspaper advertisements. A good-looking window display will make a favorable impression on people. Sooner or later, they're sure to see something that arouses the buying desire, which is the purpose of all advertising. Window-display is as much an art as painting—and twice as fascinating, in my judgment. Think of the questions of color combination, of composition, of suggestive surfaces, involved in arranging a window. Think of the difference in emotional effect between a good black and white window, and a window in scarlet."

The idea seemed to arrest his attention for a moment. "Well, I guess I've told you all you need to know, Hillquit. I always like to give a new man a bird's-eye-view of the business—get his imagination working—before he starts in. Now I want you to try your hand at window-displays for

awhile. It'll be great fun for you, if you keep the right mental attitude. If it ever gets to be a grind, it's because your thinking is wrong somewhere. At such times, I find the best tonic is either a vacation or a Turkish bath."

Doman's exposition made a strong appeal to Lee. He glimpsed the real heart of business for the first time. He saw it, not as the grim, distasteful duty he had always fancied it, but as something alluring, absorbing, captivating.

The advertising manager conducted him into the outer office and introduced him to Harry Freytag, the chief window decorator.

Somehow, after Doman's sweeping breadth and visualising power, Freytag seemed a distinct let-down. He was small and unprepossessing; his thin face and etiolated skin, his general air of dejection, gave him an expression of pinched servility.

Servility, that is, as long as Doman remained within ear-shot. But when the advertising manager's huge bulk had disappeared, Freytag waxed openly acidulous.

"Why in God's world do they want to give me another assistant?" he implored. "Every new greenhorn that shows up they drop on my shoulders."

Offhand Lee could think of no very convincing excuse for the imposition.

"Never had no experience? No, of course not," Freytag descanted peevishly. "Well, the first thing you want to do is forget all that hot air Doman's been pumpin' into you. Window-dressin' ain't an art—it's an instinct. You either got it—or you ain't; and if you ain't, no amount of teachin' will ever do any good."

Lee's silence seemed to mollify Freytag perceptibly. "Put on your coat, and we'll have a look at the windows," he directed.

The Curran store, located as it was on a corner, had sixteen show-windows, built out from the store in an old-

fashioned way; and it was the work of Freytag and his three assistants to keep each window attractively arranged, and to change the displays at least once a week.

"Each important department has one or two windows," Freytag expatiated. "It's always the same window, so that people will know just where to look for the display they want. Men's clothing has had this big double corner window ever since we moved up here. Now we'll take a look at each window," he announced, "and I want you to tell me just what you think of it, and why."

Lee surveyed the display of men's suits and spring overcoats judicially.

"I should say it was very effective, as a whole," he observed after a moment. "The chief trouble is that there's too much in the window. Fewer suits would be better." The day was cloudy and the window was lighted by clusters of lights in the ceiling. "And I think those lights distract one's attention. It would be better if they could be out of sight somewhere."

Freytag looked at Lee, then back at the window. "You're right about the lights, anyway, and maybe about the rest," he agreed.

They passed on to displays of bathrobes and cravats, women's suits and cloaks—this display occupied three windows on Woodward avenue—waists, evening gowns, furs, leather novelties, furniture, rugs, pianos and phonographs, curtains and draperies, kitchen cabinets, linens, silks. Small show cases at the entrance to the store contained silverware, books, pictures and other articles.

Lee found one or two color combinations that repelled him; and he criticised the Japanese screen that formed the background of the furniture exhibit, on the theory that its grotesque figures would draw attention from the furniture itself.

Freytag combated some of his suggestions, but his atti-

tude became more and more approving. He paused in front of the linen exhibit.

"The first two weeks in April we always feature a spring linen sale," he said. "You'll find it played up in all the advertising. Well, we work hand-and-glove with the sales end. Our displays must feature the stuff they're pushin' on the inside. You'll remember there ain't been a single price-card in any window up to now; but there are at least fifty in this window."

One large placard stood in the centre of the display. "Curran's Great Spring Linen Sale," it read. Each article in the window had its small yellow price-card—"29c., as advertised," "59c., as advertised," etc.

"It's against the store's policy to put price-tags in the window, except on sales like this," pointed out the chief window-decorator. "And we never say: 'formerly one dollar, now sixty-two cents'—either in our displays or our advertisin'. That's the Curran policy. We leave that kind of stuff to the cheap stores."

Conscious of having made a good impression on Freytag, Lee began to grow enthusiastic once more. "It looks like mighty interesting work," he said. "A man ought to have plenty of chance to show his originality."

"There you go on Doman's stuff again." Freytag's emaciated face reflected high disgust. "No, there ain't any poetry about the window-display game, take it from me. Nothin' but hard work—most of it nights and Sundays. I s'pose Doman handed you a lot of bull about promotion, too. Well, you want to forget that stuff. They give the same line of talk to every new guy, so's he'll work himself to death for them."

"Look at me!" He struck his narrow chest with his fist. "I been with Curran's for fifteen years—chief window-dresser for the last ten. Two raises since they made me chief. Promotion! Rewardin' merit! Pooh! They know

I'm the best window man in the city, so they keep me doin' that. They wouldn't give me a chance at something better—no, you can bet your sweet life they wouldn't. So take my tip, young fellow—and don't let 'em kid you."

This was disheartening news, especially after Doman's ruddy optimism; yet it had the ring of truth. Lee remembered the "hot air" dispensed so copiously at the Security Realty Company's Saturday meetings. It must be the same in every business. All employers "kidded" their workers into frantic endeavor by promising speedy promotion.

"But how do the big fellows land their jobs?" he thought himself to ask.

"Pull," vouchsafed Freytag briefly. "That's all—pull. Every one of 'em is either a relative of old man Curran, or else has some other drag with him. Look at young Pete Curran, Joe Curran's son. He's secretary and treasurer. D' you think anybody else has got a look-in to take his job away from him?"

Lee came down to cases. "How about Mr. Doman?"

"I don't know just what his pull is," admitted Freytag. "Some one told me once he had something on the old man, and the old man had to give him a good job to keep his mouth shut."

They returned to Freytag's desk, and the chief window-decorator looked speculatively through a card index.

"I was just figurin' where to start you. I want to keep you away from the departments that are goin' to features sales this next few weeks." He withdrew a card. "I guess men's clothing is as good as anything," he decided. "That's a good straight line. No fancy stuff."

He made a memorandum on the card and replaced it. "First you go to Lorimer, the buyer of the men's clothing department; or if he's out of town, to Mr. Ladue, the assistant buyer. Talk the thing over with them; see what particular stuff they want to feature; help 'em select maybe

a dozen suits and overcoats with colors that don't kill each other. Pick up a few gloves and hats—maybe some shoes and canes, if you think best. All this small stuff fills in pretty good, I find. Wednesday morning, you can give me an idea of what you're plannin', and Wednesday night we'll put it in. See if you can't think up something pretty snappy."

Lee left the store at half-past five that night in the same excited frame of mind that had been his constant companion since Mrs. Curran's limousine had stopped in the street ahead of him. His work was going to be really interesting, and he felt a quiet confidence in his ability to do it successfully. Most pleasant of all, he was enjoying to the utmost his new feeling of self-reliance—the grateful sensation of being self-supporting.

True, Harry Freytag's pessimism had left its mark. He was prepared to discount Mr. Doman's hints of better things. But it was quite enough for his happiness to be earning twenty-five dollars a week—to be spared the humiliation of returning to Chatham.

Bob Hamilton appeared at the boarding house looking woebegone.

"What's up?" asked Lee.

Bob's tell-tale lower lip started to quiver. "Lost my job," he announced. "Managing editor told me they were going to cut out suburban and he wouldn't need me after this week."

"Tough luck!" consoled Lee with genuine sympathy. "Something's sure to turn up for you, though. Maybe you'll land a better job."

Bob wagged his head dolefully. "I don't know. None of the other papers need anybody. Maybe I'm just destined to be a failure. I don't see why I'm not a success. I work hard enough."

At the rooms, Lee found two letters. One was from his mother.

"MY DARLING BOY" [she wrote]—"I can't tell you how overjoyed I am by your success. I knew it would come if I kept on praying to the Lord. Mrs. Curran must be a splendid woman, from what you say.

"Can't you come home next Saturday? It seems years since you went away, and I feel lonesome for a sight of you."

He felt the tears coming into his eyes. What a brick his mother had been! He vowed that he would make her old age supremely happy. He wondered if he could visit her this next week-end. At the thought of Chatham, his heart sank a little—then he remembered that Vera no longer lived there; that this very day she had become Mrs. Milo Higginson.

XIV

THE other letter was from Mrs. Curran.

"I am enclosing an extra ticket for the orchestral concert next week" [she wrote], "in the hope that you may be able to use it.

"Please do not postpone your dinner call too long. I shall be very much interested in hearing your impressions of the new work.

"Cordially your friend,

"LAURA L. CURRAN."

Lee was conscious of a subtle, intense pleasure as he read this note. Reflexively, his self-esteem mounted high. She had signed the note, "Cordially your friend." His friend! This splendid woman, this leader of "Society," this person of wealth and influence, had found him socially attractive. There was no predicting what such a friendship might do for him. It opened out alluring possibilities in the store—even in "Society," perhaps.

The next noon, he telephoned her from the store.

"I have been wanting to call you up ever since Thursday," he confessed. "But I thought perhaps I'd better wait until I had something definite to say."

"I was only worried that you might think me a little indelicate," said Mrs. Curran. "I don't usually have to urge people to come and see me."

Again the tone of timidity, which had so surprised Lee before.

"How are you getting on?" she asked. "And when are you coming up to tell me all about it?"

"I'll be delighted to come any night," said Lee.

"Let me see," she reflected. "I'm terribly afraid I'm

filled up for the week—that is, unless you happen to have to-night free.”

“That would be splendid,” acquiesced Lee eagerly.

The evening was again an unalloyed delight. Mrs. Curran seemed more wonderful, more perfect, to him than ever; and, filtering through the conventionalities on which she relied mostly for conversation, he saw irrefragable evidences that she really liked him.

It was a curious combination of causes that produced in Lee this emotion of near-worship of Mrs. Curran. He was far from being mercenary in his motives. The fact that her favor could work wonders for him at the store had surprisingly little to do with his feeling toward her.

He really liked her immensely. They seemed to agree so remarkably on most subjects. A genuine mental telepathy developed between them; they could catch each other's most elusive meanings. Lee often knew what Mrs. Curran was about to say before she spoke.

Add to this his sincere gratefulness. She had rescued him from the mire of despair. She had been kind to him—disinterestedly kind.

But these creditable appreciations of his hardly sufficed to account for the nebulous aureole in which she stood transfigured for him. There were certain subtle subconscious forces at work in him, which he did not completely identify till long afterwards. For one thing, he had an undefined obsession that she was a person infinitely superior to himself. Her wealth, her culture, her lofty social standing: all contrived to set her apart from other people of his ken, to limn her in outlines almost supernal. But with this recognition came another, equally vague instinct—the desire to be on intimate terms with such a one. Familiarity with a superior person is a feather in one's cap. Thus, the freshman glows when the senior calls him by his first name, the negro porter when his “boss” throws him an easy nod of

recognition on the street. Lee craved Mrs. Curran's approval, because that approval made him a more worthy person in his own eyes. And so her obvious liking for him, her deference to his opinions, her sympathy with his hardships, served as an intense and subtle flattery to him—the more so, because he identified his whole feeling toward her as gratitude and admiration.

"I can't see why you should ever have thought poorly of yourself," said the great lady. "You don't appreciate your abilities. I don't want to be personal, but it's very evident to me that you're an unusual man. You're very attractive—no, I don't mean it as flattery at all—and you possess that rare quality, intelligence—or better, *flair*."

Lee vibrated with an ecstasy that was almost painful. And somehow, her appreciation of him made him worship her the more ardently.

"Oh, by the way," recollected Mrs. Curran, as he was preparing to go. "Where were you when you telephoned me this noon?"

Lee looked his mild bewilderment at the question. "Why—at the store—in the office."

"It's nothing," she reassured him. "But perhaps, if you should call me again, you'd better go to a 'phone outside the store. Some of the people in the office might get the idea that I was using my influence to promote you, and that might antagonise them against you. We don't like to have the employés suspect any favoritism. Besides——" Mrs. Curran hesitated, her black, compelling eyes fixed thoughtfully on him.

"Yes?" encouraged Lee after an instant's silence.

Mrs. Curran's instinct toward frankness seemed to vanquish her sense of discretion. "I think I can afford to be perfectly candid with you. Our friendship—at least, I look on it as a friendship—is a little unusual. To me, it has the possibilities of becoming a fine and spiritual thing, but

when an older woman and a younger man see a great deal of each other—you know, I ~~am~~ quite a lot older than you—well, some people are always ready to say nasty things." She threw out her hands with a gesture that seemed pathetic to Lee.

His cheeks grew hot at the monstrous idea. "I don't see how anybody would dare!"

A look, almost triumphant, appeared in her vivid, slightly oblique eyes. "I *knew* you were that sort of a man." She held out her hand impulsively. "We'll be good friends in spite of them, won't we? At the same time, let's not take any chances of having our friendship traduced by vulgarminded people."

Lee's mood was heroic, protective. "I'd be proud to have the whole world know of it."

"That's splendid!" said Mrs. Curran—a little absent-mindedly, it seemed. "But let's not fly against convention as long as we don't have to. It's uncomfortable."

Lee caught the note of finality in her voice. "All right," he agreed a trifle lamely. But he could not long remain undramatic. "Good night, friend," he said with pretentious gravity.

Mrs. Curran regarded him searchingly, as if to reassure herself as to his worth, then closed her eyes.

"Good night, friend," she whispered. She opened her eyes and smiled half-apologetically. "Come soon!"

Lee's friendship with Mrs. Curran grew apace; became the important thing in his life—more absorbing even than his work at the store. Throughout the spring and into the early summer, he called as often as three or four times a week. Sunday dinner was the one fixed occasion; and ordinarily, he would remain throughout the afternoon and evening.

Neither of them seemed to tire of the other's talk. Occasionally they read aloud. They became well enough ac-

quainted so that even silences passed unnoticed. At rare intervals, usually at night, when they were in front of the fireplace, Mrs. Curran gave him brief intimations about herself. He gathered that there had been an unhappy love affair just before her wedding; that she had married Tom Curran in a mood of defiance; and that their life together had never reached noteworthy heights.

Once, Lee reached over and patted her hand. It was a daring thing to do, he thought; yet it was in keeping with the finest spirit of their friendship. Mrs. Curran's fingers closed over his for a moment.

His attitude toward her remained consistently high-minded. Their friendship seemed wholly spiritual to him—the wonderful congeniality and sympathy of two souls. He never thought of her as a woman, particularly—nor of her age.

To him one of her greatest charms was the occasional flavor of worldly wisdom that crept into her conversation. One night, for example, they were talking about his work at the store.

"If trying hard—doing my level best every day—counts for anything, I'm surely going to succeed," he said. "I don't believe there's a man in the store who's working more faithfully than I am."

Mrs. Curran regarded him quizzically. "Curran & Company is overcrowded with men who are faithful workers—and nothing more."

Lee turned toward her in his half-affronted way. "Yes—but——"

"Oh, I'm not saying that faithfulness isn't a good quality," she took him up. "But you'll never lift yourself out of the ruck simply by being faithful. The thing that gives you a better chance than all the plodders is your personality."

This doctrine seemed near-heresy, and Lee's expressive face revealed the fact.

Mrs. Curran smiled. "That's the fallacy so many fine men like you handicap themselves with. Particularly young college men. You all seem to think that life is logical, foreseeable. Like mathematics, for example, or good machinery. A matter of a few simple rules. A mental problem. It puzzles you when you put the coin of conscientious effort in the slot marked 'Success'—and lo and behold! Failure drops out."

She lighted the one after-dinner cigaret she permitted herself—this had been a real shock to Lee at first—and gazed into the fire, a look of puzzled captivation in her face, the half-smile still on her lips.

"You never can understand that life is haphazard, blind, accidental—a crawling, sprawling mass, full of weird, unanalysable forces. Take personality, for example. A lazy man with real personality will far outstrip the conscientious plodder. It's because people like you that they do things for you—not because they admire your character. Mere brains will only take you part way. The really big men in the world aren't usually the brainy men. They're the men with that mysterious thing we call force. They get what they want in some uncanny way. Most of them have luck, too."

Another puff. "You have personality, and you ought to appreciate it and use it. The faithful bookkeepers and ribbon salesmen down at the store might struggle for your personality all their lives and never acquire it. One must be born with it. So take my advice, and cultivate your personality. It'll open every door for you. Remember, a man makes more money by his nerve than by his brains nowadays."

Lee's idealisation of Mrs. Curran waxed more and more intense as summer approached. By this time, it is true, his earlier, self-conscious awe of her had entirely disap-

peared. He had not forgotten that her influence was sufficient to make or break him at the store; that her position in the world was enormously out of his reach. But with Mrs. Curran, personally, he no longer felt constraint. Their friendship was entirely beyond any differences in their temporal circumstances. His unsuspected vanity, his determination to protect her from any vicious insinuations about their friendship, his admiration for her refinement, and their remarkable mental affinity, all served to attract him more and more. Besides, he really liked her—felt strongly drawn to her.

One noon, while he was scanning a collection of French Impressionistic paintings at the Art Museum, he suddenly came upon Mrs. Curran. She was disputing earnestly over some picture with a young man in a morning coat, who looked as though he might be an artist or musician. Lee was appalled at the pang of dismay that ran through him. Mrs. Curran spoke graciously to him; even made as if to shake hands. But he feigned not to notice and hurried into another gallery.

The incident served to heighten his feelings toward her. He realised vaguely that he had come to care a great deal for her—not in any silly, banal way, of course, but as he might care for a man, for example. He was conscious of a great, consuming devotion such as one intimate friend might feel for another.

Early in June, Mrs. Curran began to make plans for leaving town. She always summered, she said, in Maine. The prospect of not seeing her for three months was thoroughly depressing to him.

The last Sunday evening before her departure, they were sitting out-of-doors, on a screened side porch that opened out from the drawing room through a window.

The minutes sped by. Lee became more and more suffused with exalted emotion.

"Isn't it odd that this friendship should have sprung up between us?" Mrs. Curran remarked. "It's so unusual, so unconventional. Yet it's perfectly vital, and entirely sincere."

"I don't think it's so odd," he demurred. "To me it seems the most natural thing in the world—and the most beautiful."

"Anyway, I want you to know how much it has meant to me, Lee."

All at once the night seemed to become very still.

Lee gulped hard. "Well," he faltered, "I can't describe how I feel toward you. I'd do anything in the world for you." He determined upon a frank revelation. "It seems to me I might say I love you—not in any cheap way, of course—not in the way base-minded people might think. You can understand. A fine spiritual love, such as any two intimate friends might feel."

His heart choked his throat. He was in torturous suspense lest he should have overstepped the bounds.

Mrs. Curran remained silent. After a moment, she rose.

"I'm awfully sorry——" he began.

She held up a restraining hand. "I understand you, dear boy," she whispered.

She held her hand out, and he seized it. Then he realised that she was trembling.

"It's all right," she said, and smiled up at him. "I think we must be going in. I have a great deal to do to-morrow."

Through the darkness, she looked vaguely youthful.

She took a step toward the open window, the sill of which was set awkwardly some fifteen inches above the floor of the porch.

Lee smiled back at her in a sudden exuberant relief that she had not misunderstood.

She extended her hand again, so that he might steady

her as she stepped up on the sill. An inexplicable impulse possessed him; he swung her up in his arms and carried her through the window into the half-light of the drawing room inside.

He heard her give a little gasp.

"Put me down!" she whispered.

The sense of his strength, the exhilaration of his daring bade him defy her command an instant longer. He laughed. Suddenly, Mrs. Curran put her head down on his shoulder much as a tired child might.

He set her down after a moment. He was conscious of pride, of successful achievement. But Mrs. Curran clung to his arm tightly, with upturned face and closed eyes.

Lee became instinctively aware that something more was expected of him. He had cast himself in a certain rôle; now he must live up to it, or prove disappointing. He put his arm around her and kissed her. But he no longer had the sense of daring initiative.

"My darling!" she whispered tensely in his ear. Her outstretched fingers caressed his back.

The intimations of the situation continued to filtrate through his swirling brain, and he reached over to the nearby standing lamp and switched it off.

Later on, there came to him the fine, hair-line perception that somehow things had not turned out at all as he expected.

XV

THROUGHOUT the spring, Lee had been devoting himself conscientiously to his work at Curran & Company's department store.

His first window-display of men's clothing was undeniably crude. It lacked atmosphere.

"It's the composition," Freytag decided briefly. He shifted an overcoat farther to one side, and behold! the effect for which Lee had been striving stood accomplished.

Freytag insisted, too, on putting in more suits and overcoats.

"Loads too empty," he explained.

On this point, Lee silently disagreed. And as long as he remained under Freytag, there persisted this tacit contest between them as to the number of articles that window-displays should include. The chief decorator preferred ornate displays, moreover; while Lee from the first instinctively chose simplicity.

But Lee's taste, his sense of color values, his ability to devise effective backgrounds, developed fast. He studied the show-windows of other stores; he visited his former haunt, the public library, and read avidly the few books that dealt with window-trimming. Freytag soon gave him charge of the men's furnishings, boy's clothing, and toilet articles departments—and under supervision, women's suits and coats. When he had any spare time, he tried his hand, not very successfully, at card-writing.

As Lee's consciousness of ability grew, he began suggesting alterations. His chief complaint concerned itself with the system of illuminating the displays. It seemed to him

that the electric lights should be concealed in some way from the eyes of pedestrians.

"A window is just like a stage," he contended. "You never see the footlights in a theatre."

Freytag was lethargic. It would require expensive and troublesome repairs to change the lights.

"We'll have to come to it sooner or later," argued Lee. "Look at Fordyce, Miller & Company's indirect lighting system. It's much more effective and restful than ours."

Lee also proposed discontinuing the use of manikins for displaying men's suits.

"What I want is a plain panel background of oak or imitation mahogany—and display racks to match. Suits and overcoats look much better, dressed on a rack, than they do on a dummy. It's the same with women's coats, and perhaps suits, too. You can get a certain richness of effect."

But Freytag held out for manikins. He believed the new vogue of discarding them would not last permanently.

Lee's suggestions were becoming very irritating to the chief window-trimmer, it seemed.

"I'm the boss in this department," he would say. "Don't go round thinkin' up a lot of unnecessary changes. Just do things my way."

As best he could, nevertheless, Lee continued to study the problem of getting the maximum of novel and artistic effect out of his windows. His displays began to attract some slight attention. Once or twice, Mr. Doman took pains to congratulate him.

With Lee's increasing success, Freytag became openly jealous. The chief trimmer announced that thereafter all displays must be inspected by him before they were exhibited. This plan gave him opportunity for considerable petty bullying. He never failed to destroy the carefully contrived effectiveness of Lee's work. If a display revealed

any genuine originality, he would usually keep his assistant until midnight, insisting on a reconstruction of the exhibit along conservative lines.

Despite these annoyances, Lee found the work of consuming interest. He never quite lost the viewpoint that Howard Doman had given him in the beginning: the perception of the romance of the thing. He saturated his mind with the idea that it was all great fun—an imaginative, æsthetic pleasure of the finest sort.

Often he would wander aimlessly through the store, keeping himself sensitive to the confusion, the noise, the unquenchable activity. More frequently, he would take his stand on the mezzanine balcony that hedged two sides of the ground floor, preferably about four o'clock in the afternoon, the busiest time of the day. From this vantage point, he could bring almost the entire first floor under his vision. His eye would pick up the familiar details: the aisles choked with hundreds of people; the show cases and counters disorderly with mussed-up merchandise; scores of clerks, men and women, some energetic, some languidly indifferent; numerous stunted-looking children—cash-boys and cash-girls. Everywhere an insatiable, restless flux of humanity. A thousand waves of sound, combining into one vast sea of noise; the shrill cries of saleswomen calling "Cash Girl!" rising intermittently like wave-crests.

He liked to fancy the significance of all this babel and bustle. There was subtle method even in the arrangement of the various departments. Near the doors were the luxuries: jewelry, toilet goods, leather novelties, cameras, and the more expensive haberdashery. Everybody must pass these inviting displays in order to reach the "notions" and such staples as handkerchiefs, hosiery, men's shirts and underwear. The elevators were as far from the entrances as possible. On the upper floors were men's and women's

clothing of all sorts, furniture, carpets, dry goods and countless other necessities.

Lee felt a consummate interest merely in watching the sluggish flow of humanity through the narrow aisles. Down on the floor, most of the people were sordid-looking; but from the balcony, he could revel in an Olympian viewpoint. He searched his mind for a descriptive phrase.

The Romance of Barter! That was it.

One afternoon in May, he stood looking down on the black throngs below. A hosiery sale was being featured, and women besieged the counters four-deep. It amused Lee to pick out the two women detectives who loitered casually in the vicinity.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and discovered Howard Doman at his side.

"Listening to the Overtones?" the advertising manager asked with his characteristic smile.

Lee made some affirmative answer. For a moment, they watched the crowds in silence.

Abruptly, Doman's mood became practical. He turned his keen alive eyes upon Lee.

"If you were general manager of this store, what changes would you make?"

Lee meditated. "Well, in the first place, I'd certainly try to get more floor-space some way. It's not only dangerous to pack people together like that, it's poor business. A lot of them will give up in despair. Secondly, I'd insist on order. The merchandise always looks mussy, it seems to me. Of course that's largely due to the lack of space."

Doman nodded his acquiescence. "How about the store organisation? Would you change that?"

"I don't know much about the organisation," Lee set forth somewhat uncertainly. "But I do know this: your sales-people are only about 50 per cent. efficient. A lot of them are lazy, and a lot half-sick. Some with tuberculosis, I

should say. And the whole force is honeycombed with dissatisfaction, jealousy, irritation. Their general idea is that they're underpaid and imposed on, and that the proper come-back on the firm is to do as little as possible. Talk about having fun with one's job! I don't believe a single salesman in the store gets any pleasure out of his work."

"Very true," said Doman with unusual seriousness. "It's in the very atmosphere, and I'm surprised it isn't fatal to the business. Well,"—he turned away—"perhaps we'll have the chance of changing it some day."

Lee had been conscious for a long time of this sullen, inimical spirit among the employées. Freytag never missed an opportunity of sneering at the idea that merit was rewarded in the Curran store. Preferment came solely through "pull" or even less creditable causes, he insisted over and over again.

In the case of Freytag, Lee wasn't at all certain that justice had not been done. The chief window-trimmer was a faithful worker and he had been with the Company for fifteen years—ten years without promotion. On the other hand, Freytag was a "knocker"; he was uniformly petulant; and it was more than doubtful if he had the education to make good in a better position. But Lee had gradually become acquainted with a number of the employés, and every one of them cherished this same obsession against the firm.

"They pay us just as little as they can," was the way complaints ran. "So why should we break our backs for them? Promotion? Wait till you've been here a few years and seen what chance merit has against pull. Wait till you've seen new men boosted over your head a few times just because they're relatives of old Curran or have some drag with him. Then you'll see it isn't any use, and you'll do just like we do—soldier on the job all you can."

All this was very demoralising to Lee. In the face of

these seemingly justified grievances, Howard Doman's fine theories melted away like thin vapor. He began to look about him more closely. The three real powers in the store were Michael Curran, the president and general manager; his nephew, Peter Curran, who was secretary and treasurer, in spite of his apparent incompetence; and Harrison Estabrook, a young society man who had married Michael Curran's niece, and who now held the position of store superintendent. And so on down the line. There was some such explanation for every man who had a good job; they were either relatives or intimate friends of the Curran family. Howard Doman was the one puzzling exception. Every one admitted his transcendent ability as an advertising manager; Lee even heard occasional assertions that Doman really deserved to be at the head of the business: but none of the employes would admit that Doman had won his place through sheer merit. Various vague rumors were current that he had some mysterious hold on old Michael Curran.

The most startling explanation proceeded from a rheumy-eyed, affected young man named Barker, who was stock clerk in the men's clothing department. Lee's work threw him into frequent contact with Barker, and they became fairly well acquainted. The stock clerk had an air of being "wise" to every smallest detail in the store; and from time to time he gave Lee, "in strictest confidence, you know," various salacious details about the heads of the business, and more frequently, about the morals of certain salesgirls. Barker had worked his way up from a cash-boy's job; but he was virulent in his belief that merit counted for nothing.

Lee mentioned Doman.

"Howard Doman?" Barker laughed derisively. "He's a good man, all right, but no better than lots of others." He looked around in his usual cautious manner. "I'll tell you about Howard Doman. He was just an ordinary salesman, till Tom Curran's widow happened to fall for him. Doman

used to be a dam' sight more handsome than he is now. I don't know Mrs. Curran—no such luck for mine!—but they say she gobbles men alive!" He winked suggestively. "Anyway from that time on, Doman began to shoot ahead. He's got brains; but it wasn't brains that landed him his five-thousand-a-year job."

This was before the episode of the side porch. Lee turned pale with wrath.

"What's the matter?" demanded Barker.

Lee had a blind desire to seize this vile slanderer by the throat, and choke out an apology. But that might only spread the story. Instead he walked away without answering. He wondered whether he ought to say anything to Mrs. Curran or Doman about it. In the end, he kept silent; but the incident served to heighten his feeling of protectorship over his good friend.

It served also to persuade him for a time that the complainings of the employés were largely without foundation. It was just an unfounded obsession with every underling in the store that ambition, effort, brains were futile. No one would believe that Doman, for example, had won his way up on his own abilities.

Yet the disconcerting fact remained that Doman was the only important figure in the business who could be accounted for solely on the basis of merit. All of the others owed their preferment to nepotism or mere personal "pull." Even Doman was not on the board of directors—not a member of the inmost circle that really directed the business.

Late one afternoon in the early part of June, Lee had gone up to the cashier's office to get his semi-monthly salary. The Curran pay-envelope had heretofore been a small affair with nothing but the employé's name written on it. But to-day the envelope was much larger; and underneath his name, Lee read the following in bold type:

ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH YOUR PAY?
IF YOU ARE, WE DON'T WANT YOU.
IF YOU AREN'T, WE'LL HELP YOU INCREASE IT.

"What's all this, Mac?" he inquired of the meek, grey-haired assistant-cashier.

McPherson winked. "Just some of Mr. Doman's foolishness." It was after hours, and the offices were nearly deserted. "Come on in, an' I'll show you something."

Lee entered the cashier's office curiously.

The old assistant cashier pulled out a long drawer. "Here's the pay envelopes for the next ten weeks." He picked out several samples. "Each week, the printing is different, you see."

Lee glanced over the envelopes. The first one read:

YOU INCREASE YOUR SALES—
WE'LL INCREASE YOUR PAY.

Another announced:

CURRAN'S DEPENDS ON ITS SALESMEN—
ITS SALESMEN CAN DEPEND ON CURRAN'S.

A third—

WE ARE WATCHING DAY AND NIGHT FOR THE
EXCEPTIONAL SALESMAN.
HE CAN NAME HIS OWN FIGURE.
CAN YOU BECOME THE EXCEPTIONAL SALESMAN?

Still another:

WE NEED MEN AT THE TOP.
WE SHALL PICK THEM FROM OUR EMPLOYEES.
ARE YOU GOING TO BE ONE OF THEM—
OR ARE YOU CONTENT WITH MEDIOCRITY?

The last one—

WE WANT TO MAKE CURRAN'S THE BIGGEST
DEPARTMENT STORE IN DETROIT—
ARE YOU WITH US OR AGAINST US?

Old McPherson chuckled. "Rich, ain't it? Doman's pretty slick. I'll bet a lot of new folks in the store will take it serious. An' this is just the first. Doman's goin' to fire this sort of stuff at 'em right along now, I hear. He calls it his 'Success Slogan Series.'"

Lee looked absentmindedly at the envelopes. Oddly their message sent a little thrill of ambition through him. A faintly reminiscent thrill. Yes, they sounded very much like the story of "The Two Paths," in Fisk's Encyclopædia; or the Security Realty Company's advertisement: "Only hustler need apply. Splendid opening for an ambitious industrious man."

"You don't take much stock in it, Mac?" he suggested.

McPherson laughed again—this time gratingly. "I'm no fool. I've been with Curran's since 1892. I've given 'em the best years of my life. I've worked hard. I ain't missed more than four or five days since I started. An' what's it all got me? Pay? Dam' little. Promotion? No. They know I can't get a better job anywheres else, so why should they care?" He took off his spectacles, and extended his trembling forefinger by way of emphasis. "No, sir, this stuff ain't sincere, Lee. They don't mean a word of it. They've said it before. The only purpose of it is to kid us into workin' harder."

Lee found McPherson's argument almost convincing. "Mac" was a faithful worker and intelligent, too. Everybody liked him. And there were other faithful old employés who were doing exactly the same work to-day as when they started.

It was only two days after his astonishing experience in Mrs. Curran's drawing room that Howard Doman sent for him.

"Freytag's been complaining about your work lately." The advertising manager's incisive eyes searched his visitor's face.

"Why that's the limit, Mr. Doman!" Lee burst out.

Doman listened to his subordinate's recital of grievances with an increasing smile of comprehension.

"I'm not surprised," he remarked. "Anyway, I've had my eye on you from the beginning. I think you're about ripe for some copy-writing. Perhaps we can work out some interesting advertising ideas together. You can notify Freytag at once. And by the way—your salary'll be forty dollars."

Lee was so overwhelmed with happiness that he became inarticulate. The best part of it all was that it revived his faith in the rightness of things. He had tried hard, he had kept the right viewpoint on his work—in short, he had done his best; and now he had his recompense. All those grumbling employes were wrong, after all. The fault must be their own. Curran's certainly did reward merit; and life was a simple proposition—much as Fisk's Encyclopædia painted it.

At first, Freytag seemed stunned by the news of Lee's promotion; then an angry flush crept into his pasty skin.

"Oh, so that's how the land lays, eh?" he sneered. "Another case of family drag." He spat contemptuously.

"What do you mean?" Lee stopped short.

"Don't worry. Everybody's wise to a certain lady bein' very much interested in you—but no one knew till now just how *much* interested."

He turned, as if to leave; but Lee caught him by the collar and swung him around.

"You damned little weasel!" he shouted. "How dare you insinuate such things!" He drew back his fist, but Freytag broke away and ran out of the room.

An hour later, the window-trimmer sidled into Lee's new office with a servile air and an abject apology. But it was clear that his motive was solely economic: he was afraid of losing his job.

The *contretemps*, though, sufficed to shock Lee into seeing the real truth about his status at the Curran store. Freytag was quite right. Lee had been promoted, not because he deserved it, but because Mrs. Curran was in love with him.

The melancholy procession of his lost illusions began to troop through his mind. Vera, Fred Badger, Eberenz, O'Neill, Hauxhurst. Less certainly, Mrs. Curran. Businesses weren't honest. Neither were men. Merit and hard work were futile. Friendships were hollow shams. To idealise a woman was the superlative folly.

He had tried to be fine, high-minded—and for his pains he had known heartsickening failure. But when he had been a little less fine—as with Mrs. Curran—swift success had attended him.

Well, the lesson seemed plain.

That night, it is on record, Lee burned Fisk's Encyclopædia in Mrs. Holmes' furnace. He had been a fool, a ninny—but now he was through with fatuous ideals about the world for all time.

PART TWO

I

ONE'S mental viewpoint is hardly to be readjusted in a day, however. Lee found it difficult, for example, to dislodge his ideals of Mrs. Curran. She had misunderstood him, of course. She had preached the gospel of impersonal friendship and then translated his spiritual devotion for her into the most personal and passionate of loves.

At the time, Lee had been conscious of a bemused surprise at the turn things were taking. He cherished a definite persuasion that it was Mrs. Curran's subtle clinging insistence, and not any impetuosity on his own part, that had brought about such an unforeseen dénouement. As he stole out of the side door of Mrs. Curran's house that eventful June evening, he assuredly felt very like a sheep, and not at all like an irresistible Don Juan.

But that of course was caddish, he reflected the next day. It had been his fault entirely—his fault that he had given Mrs. Curran any opportunity to misunderstand him; his fault that he had not called a halt at once. He was a full-grown man, and it was ridiculous to suppose that he had been forced to do anything he hadn't wanted to do.

Indeed, Mrs. Curran and he cared a great deal for one another. There had been a real tenderness of feeling between them. He was deeply grateful to her for her benefices. And she was a magnetic, attractive woman.

And yet she was so incomparably more attractive as a friend than as a lover. . . .

He wished that he could deracinate that low-down, accursed feeling of his that he had been *led*!

For the first time, he thought of Mrs. Curran in terms of her age.

But the thing was done. It was too bad; still it couldn't be helped now. Certainly it could never happen again; they had both learned the danger. He was glad she was going away that afternoon. The summer would give them both time for a mental readjustment.

It occurred to him all at once that she might be terribly angry with him—might have him discharged at the store. It was quite clear that she had felt no animosity toward him when he left the night before. But women were subject to violent revulsions of feeling, he fancied.

He kept his promise to telephone her at noon; and to his indescribable relief, she talked quite as if nothing had happened.

"I've just had a telegram from the East," she said almost at once. "I'll have to postpone going for another week."

"I'm awfully glad," Lee said, in perfect sincerity. Yet he was conscious of definite misgivings. He was aware, also, of putting a slightly spurious enthusiasm into his tone as he asked: "I want to see you again, just as soon as I can."

Mrs. Curran evinced some uncertainty. "Day after tomorrow?" she finally suggested.

It seemed incumbent on him to protest.

"To-night," he insisted.

"I can't possibly—well—yes, I will," she yielded.

He thought she seemed gayer, more youthful-looking than ever that night. Perhaps it was the novelty of her coiffure, or the unfamiliar, salmon-colored scarf she wore about her shoulders. No, her very expression was different. Yet—

and this Lee realised with a pang—one didn't take note of youthfulness in a girl.

She was being awfully plucky, he decided, about the unhappy culmination of the night before.

Not until they were again outside, on the sheltered little side porch, did they drift toward actualities.

"Can you forgive me?" Lee implored.

Mrs. Curran felt for his hand, by way of answer. "It's all so wonderful," she said, almost in a whisper. "I can't believe that you love me as you do."

He sensed that her mood was by no means penitential, but he went on. "What shall we do? Are you going to marry me?"

Mrs. Curran made no immediate reply. "Thank you for that," she said at last. "It shows me again how splendid you are. But it can't be. It wouldn't be right." Then with perfect candor: "My only fear is that I'm taking something that doesn't belong to me, dear. I ought not to keep you from falling in love with some young girl."

Her seeming magnanimity moved Lee deeply. "Not at all," he insisted.

She sighed. "I couldn't have believed it possible that I should have a love such as yours."

Somehow Lee found it quite impossible to elucidate his theory that the affair had been a regrettable accident, to be perpetually guarded against in the future.

Besides, he exculpated himself, he really did love Mrs. Curran—in a way.

He realised that his failure to speak out now meant committing himself irrevocably to a relationship he had not sought and did not want, yet he remained silent.

In the end, the delay of a week in Mrs. Curran's departure broadened into an indefinite postponement. Instead of going to Maine for the summer, she finally took a cottage at a northern Michigan resort for four weeks in August.

II

TO his everlasting credit, it must be set down that Lee's failure to break off relations with Mrs. Curran at the very outset was due not at all to mercenary fears for his job.

His advancement at the store had already been remarkably rapid; and during the next two years, his success was destined to continue unabated. He no longer harbored the faintest delusion regarding his preferment; it was not due to his conspicuous ability, or his capacity for hard work, though he did reveal both of these commendable qualities; it was due solely to Mrs. Curran's "pull." The moment her favor ceased, his upward progress would stop instantly. Indeed, he doubted not that Mrs. Curran had but to frown upon him, and he would be discharged forthwith.

Yet it cannot be repeated with too much emphasis that Lee's complaisance—in the beginning, at least—was founded neither on hopes of promotion nor fears of discharge. Weak and indecisive he doubtless showed himself; base and sordid, not at all.

Any lingering uncertainties as to the real reason for his rapid promotion vanished when he tried to help Bob Hamilton.

Bob's misfortunes had begun when his newspaper "let him out," the very day of Lee's employment by Curran & Company. As Lee's star rose, his roommate's descended.

At first, Bob had been obsessed with the idea of writing short stories.

"The magazines are beginning to hand out big checks for stories," he told Lee. "I read the other day of some chap

getting five hundred dollars for five thousand words. Not very much of a story, either. I can write just as good stuff."

For two weeks, he went about with an aloof, portentous air. Lee, full of his own new visions of success, understood in a general way that Bob had thought out a "corking good plot," and was working on the first draft of his story. Presently, a typewriter appeared in their rooms. Bob became more preoccupied than ever. Through his thick-lensed spectacles, he looked positively owlish. His manner revealed that he considered his newly discovered genius in the light of a solemn trust for the benefit of humanity.

At last, with the mien of one conferring immortality, he turned the manuscript over to Lee.

"See if you think it's any good," he said with specious modesty, and hurried from the house.

Considerably impressed, Lee looked at the title. "Two Women," it read. The story, he found, dealt with an impressionable young man, and the profound influence on his life of two women, both beautiful: the one, unscrupulous, designing—a vampire; the other, ingenuous, devoted to good works, thoroughly virtuous. At the last, the "good girl" saved the young man from the fell clutches of the vampire lady.

The characters seemed none too convincing to Lee; but the story was well-written, and the moral was impeccable.

"Fine!" he encouraged Bob. "It's loads better than most of the stuff in magazines."

Bob rolled his head gravely. "I don't think people will get the full significance of the story's message the first time through. That's my only fear: it'll go way over their heads."

He spent a day deciding which magazine was the most worthy medium for the dissemination of a great moral truth. Ultimately, he chose a popular monthly, and mailed the story.

While he was waiting for the magazine's gratified acceptance—enclosing check, of course—he set to work on a second story—one that would rival de Maupassant at his best, would set people asking who “that new man Hamilton” was, anyway. It seemed that his fund of plot-germs was inexhaustible. Not so, however, his meager bank account, on which he was now forced to draw.

Then transpired an amazing thing: “Two Women” came back! To be certain, a printed slip explained that the rejection did not “imply a lack of merit.” But Bob was righteously indignant.

“Fools!” he cried. “Well, it serves ’em right. I’ll let *McWhorter’s* have it!”

By an odd coincidence, *McWhorter’s* discovered that “Two Women” was not suited to its “present needs.” Bob, a little nonplussed, sent the manuscript to a third magazine. Meanwhile, his second story finally reached completion and was laboriously typewritten. Bob entitled it “The Red Rose.”

“It has more adventure, more action than ‘Two Women,’” he confided to Lee. “That’s what the low-brows want these days.”

But New York editors remained unconscionably dense. Both manuscripts came back promptly, and Bob’s third story lagged. He drew his last dollar from the savings bank, and began to remember the materialistic details of life once more.

“I guess most authors have the dickens of a time at first,” sympathised Lee.

But Bob, by this time, seemed thoroughly deflated. His eyes were tired and moist, and his tell-tale lower lip trembled.

“I don’t know,” he doubted. “Seems as though I try hard enough to succeed. Guess it simply isn’t in me.”

He made the round of the newspapers again, but there

were no openings. He left his name with two employment agencies that specialised in "genteel positions" and incidentally took two dollars apiece away from him as a "registration fee." He inserted a liner in the "Wanted-Situations-Male" columns. He even contemplated seeking the "splendid opening for an ambitious, industrious man," still offered by the Security Realty Company; but Lee, no longer constrained by pride to glorify the real estate business, gave him timely warning.

By the first of July, Bob had borrowed thirty dollars from Lee, and was still looking for work, in a vague, hopeless sort of way. It was apparent that he was about at the end of his rope.

His unhappy situation involved Lee in a problem which he felt he could not postpone solving much longer. He must either keep on loaning Bob money, or he must "ditch" him. The former alternative seemed highly distasteful. Many of his instincts prescribed getting rid of his roommate. He could no longer conceal from himself that he despised Bob's pusillanimity. He began to think of his roommate as a drag, an incubus, upon his own upward career. Besides, with his new prosperity came the desire to move to better rooms, to ameliorate his whole mode of living. Every time he came home from Mrs. Curran's beautifully appointed house, his own quarters seemed bleaker, more barren.

Yet he could not withhold a very genuine sympathy for Bob's plight. It reminded him so vividly of his own situation less than four months before. Bob *was* a nuisance, of course; but he had been Lee's only friend in Detroit for six long months.

At this juncture, a ridiculously simple solution occurred to Lee. Why not get Bob a job at the Curran store? Bob had no nerve, but he was clever enough in his way.

He took the matter up with Howard Doman, who referred him noncommittally to Mr. Jameson. Lee was by

now on familiar terms with the employment manager, and he broached the hiring of Bob with easy confidence.

But Jameson, his faintly humorous air still in evidence, interposed unexpected difficulties.

"I don't doubt what you say about your friend, Hillquit," he averred. "But we're full up—letting people go instead of taking 'em on. Of course, I'll be glad to put his name on the list, and give him the first chance."

It came home to Lee very sharply that his influence at the store was precisely *nil*.

His next thought involved enlisting Mrs. Curran's good offices on Bob's behalf—much as he disliked placing himself under further obligation to her.

His benefactress, too, remained surprisingly unmoved by his recital of Bob's unfortunate situation.

"Of course, my dear, you must understand," she told him, "I can't make a practice of interfering in the management of the store. That would demoralise discipline. You were the exception to my rule."

It hurt Lee's pride to point out that he was asking her influence for Bob as a personal favor to himself.

To this plea, Mrs. Curran yielded. "I'll see what I can do," she promised. "But he mustn't expect anything better than a clerkship or something like that."

He thanked her, but the incident depressed him. It seemed to him he was now more inescapably under bond to her than ever.

Two days afterward, Jameson told him, with a significant smile, that there was an opening for a salesman in the men's furnishing department.

"I'll be glad, as a favor to you, to put your friend in," he concluded.

It was worth all his personal humiliation to see Bob's face light up at the news.

"Just see how they've boosted you, Lee!" he vociferated.

"If you only knew how I've been envying your success! And now I'll have a chance to climb up just behind you."

Lee repressed a cynical smile. Poor Bob would find the reality very disappointing. He wondered if all such envy arose from similar ignorance of the real facts—if every successful man or woman was paying the price for success in loss of self-respect.

III

IN spite of his occasional vague unhappiness of spirit, Lee found his new work absorbingly interesting. Then, too, there was the elation of financial success. Forty dollars a week seemed like inexhaustible wealth to him.

Howard Doman took time off one day for another of his "bird's-eye-view" talks.

"The whole Curran store," he expounded, "exists for just one purpose—to sell goods. Everything else centres around that big purpose. Advertising is only good insofar as it helps to sell goods. Never forget that point. Every inch of newspaper space we pay for must produce results in increased sales."

He went on to describe the mechanism of the Curran advertising. Each morning at nine o'clock, Michael Curran presided over a meeting of the more important department buyers. Young Peter Curran, secretary and treasurer of the Company, Harrison Estabrook, the store superintendent, and Doman were also members of this board of strategy. The principal business of the meeting was the decision as to which department's wares were to be exploited one week from the day in question. Ordinarily, it was the custom to adhere closely to the schedule of the preceding year. If on June 28th, 1907, the chief emphasis had been placed on a special sale of boys' suits, it was more than likely that June 28th, 1908, would again discover boys' suits in the foreground. Frequently there were hot disputes between various departments: the linen buyer, for instance, might find his stock clogged with a certain line that had not

moved as rapidly as expected; and he would clamor for a special sale to relieve the congestion, irrespective of the rights of other departments.

Of all such disputes, Michael Curran was the final arbiter. His board of strategy was solely advisory; it possessed no real power. Michael Curran had his finger on the pulse of the entire business. He knew early each day just what the preceding day's sales had aggregated. He knew pretty accurately how much stock remained on the shelves each night. There was a board of directors, to be sure, of which Mrs. Curran and Estabrook were the other members; but Michael Curran was the real dictator of the business nevertheless.

The campaign for the following week having been determined, Doman's work began. One of his assistants immediately went into a long conference with the buyer of the department to be featured, and emerged with complete data of the goods comprising the sale, their qualities, their selling points and their prices. Doman and his assistant would go over these details with painstaking care, and Doman would decide in a general way how much space was to be allotted to each class of goods. The assistant would then write out the "copy" for the advertisement, while Doman devoted himself to planning the "layout," or general diagram of the advertisement. The "layout" indicated the location of the headings, illustrations, and the spaces for each class of goods. Doman wrote most of the headings himself. He was considered an exceptional craftsman in matters of arrangement and type—in making his salient ideas stand out.

Doman next revised the "copy" prepared by his assistant. The descriptive matter of each class of goods was usually written on a separate sheet of paper, numbered to correspond with a similarly numbered space on the "layout."

The advertisement was by this time in shape for final approval. Michael Curran reserved the nominal right to

alter all advertising matter, but of late he had seldom exercised this privilege.

Four copies of the "layout" and "copy" were made, one for each newspaper. Advertising matter, Doman explained, must ordinarily reach the papers two days in advance to insure ample time for proofreading. Extra proofs were usually struck off, and distributed throughout the department to be exploited by the sale, so that each salesman could familiarise himself with every detail of the featured goods.

Curran & Company used a full page advertisement every day in three Detroit newspapers, sometimes in four. "A whole page is five times more effective than a half-page," Doman explained. The store made yearly contracts for "preferred space"; every Curran "ad" appeared either on the third or the fifth page. Every newspaper reader in the city subconsciously expected that advertisement on its customary page. At times, the advertising occupied more than a page; the men's clothing and furnishings departments would announce their wares from the sporting page, perhaps.

The Curran advertising harmonised with the general policy of the store. It was neither ultra-conservative nor garishly spectacular. "When we want to designate the male of the species, we don't say 'gents,' and we don't say 'gentlemen,'" epitomised Doman. "We say 'men.'" Each advertisement was cast in the same general form—a fairly heavy heading, and the rest of the "copy" set up in narrow columns. Doman didn't believe in "stock cuts," but he liked original, slightly humorous illustrations to put life into his displays. "We don't scream at people," he commented. "We just button-hole them in neighborly fashion. Most important of all, we're honest. We always understate, rather than overstate.

"It's a great game, Lee," the advertising manager mused, his alive grey eyes half-closed. "There's as much poetry

and classic symmetry of form in a good ad, as there is in the *Odyssey*—and look how many more people read your stuff when you're a publicity man. But you've got a good deal harder job than the average word-artist. All he's trying to do is to stir you so much that you'll either laugh or cry. But the ad-man must stir people so much that they feel an irresistible craving to come to his store and buy.

"There's your whole problem. Stir people's imaginations. See to it that your words reach out and grip them. Use suggestive phrases. Make men feel the warm snugness of Curran overcoats. Make women revel in the pictured sheen of Curran silks. Always try to leave that vivid picture in their minds. Always make your words caress some pleasant sense of sight or touch or smell. Always be genuinely enthusiastic yourself, in the first place, before you try to make your readers enthusiastic. And always keep the practical viewpoint—never, for God's sake, let your stuff get art-y!"

Lee's first work was to familiarise himself in a general way with the entire store's stock of goods. He spent a whole month going from department to department. He was already well versed in the stock of the various men's departments, and the toilet articles and women's suit-and-cloak departments. His window-dressing experience had done that much for him. But he knew almost nothing about furniture and rugs. He hadn't the faintest conception of the difference between *crêpe* and *cretonne*, *crinoline* and *tafetâ*. His ignorance of millinery and embroideries, of ribbons and patterns, was abysmal.

After that, Doman put him to work on a small advertising booklet for the kodak department, then on a series of letters to a special list of customers, announcing the first of the fall openings. Little by little, he began writing copy for newspaper advertisements.

There were three other assistants directly under Doman's

supervision. Holman Hart did nothing but write copy. Whitehead specialised in the various women's departments and dry goods. Ben Reuter devoted himself exclusively to catalog advertising. Lee found it easy to get along with all three. He did not especially fear competition with them. They were all technically clever; but they lacked his education; their ideas had no breadth.

Lee could not help noticing Hart's disquietude about his own future. Hart had been in the advertising department for ten years. He considered himself Doman's "right hand bower," as he expressed it; and it was obvious that he viewed the advertising manager's open favor of Lee with anxiety.

"How long have you known Doman?" he would ask. Then he would try to discourage Lee. "Hell! There's no future in the advertisin' department, Hillquit. All we do is spend money. Curran keeps down advertisin' salaries as low as possible. The men who are sellin' the goods are the ones who draw down the big money. Some of the buyers make eight or ten thousand a year. Take it from me, there's nothin' for you here. Get Doman to make you assistant buyer in some good live department."

Hart was forty-five, bald and sandy-moustached. He had a family. Lee felt sorry for him, but he had by now determined to suppress his softer inclinations. If he could get ahead of Hart, he purposed doing so, no matter how much his rival's feelings were hurt, no matter how much longer Hart had been working in the department.

And it was daily becoming clearer that Lee was destined to become Doman's chief assistant. Doman liked him personally and respected his ability; the other three assistants were nothing but mechanical incidents to him.

Gradually it was noised abroad, too, that Lee had a "pull"—was a man with a big future in the Curran store. He noticed with astonishment the increasing deference of the

salesmen. "Mr. Hillquit" succeeded plain "Hillquit" and "Lee." It was laughable to discern the anxiety of Freytag, Barker, McPherson and others who had "knocked" the store to him.

Lee had no illusions about this deference. It was entirely superficial, he knew. Below the surface were rancid jealousy and malevolence. He was familiar enough with the psychology of the employés to imagine the gusto with which they must be seizing upon the real explanation for his success. He could picture them licking their lips over the thought of Mrs. Curran and himself. They would cite his rapid promotion as a corroboration of their cynical attitude toward the store.

"Shows what 'pull' does," he could hear them saying. "Hillquit gets boosted because he makes love to Mrs. Curran. Pretty soon, he'll probably be preaching to us about how hard work and merit are the things that bring a better job and more pay."

All this had the effect at first of overwhelming Lee with self-consciousness and a sense of guilt. It also heightened his feeling of loyalty toward Mrs. Curran. What they were saying was outrageous, of course. His relationship with Mrs. Curran was not sordid. He had had no thought of promotion at any time during their acquaintance. Whatever else might be said of their affair, it was free from venal motives on his part. Nevertheless, it was perfectly true, he realised, that he owed this first employment and his subsequent promotion solely to Mrs. Curran.

What helped him, as much as anything else, to steel himself was the gradual incredible perception that nobody thought there was anything at all shameful about his ethics. All the clerks were secretly bitter about his promotion over their heads. But that was mere envy. Every one seemed to feel that he had done a very clever thing in pretending to fall in love with Mrs. Curran. Most of them wouldn't

have hesitated an instant in doing the same thing. It wasn't his morals they sneered at. It was the fact that "pull" counted for everything, and mere faithfulness, nothing.

The gossip reached the office force in due time, but no one seemed to think the less of him for it. Many, in fact, went out of their way to be friendly to him. He was constantly engaged for lunch. He detected the first signs of toadyism. These people cared nothing for him, he realised. They simply figured that his friendship would soon become a valuable business asset.

He had a well-founded suspicion that even the heads of the business identified him as "Mrs. Curran's young man." Now he understood Jameson's faintly humorous manner with him. The employment manager had divined the situation from the first. Young Peter Curran was likewise disposed to take an amused view of the situation; but Harrison Estabrook, who was reputed to have married Pansy Curran solely for her money, apparently took a more serious view of Lee's moral obliquity, for he remained aloof and indefinitely contemptuous.

Even old Michael Curran was in on the secret, it appeared. He was away during most of the summer, but once or twice, as he passed through the offices, Lee was aware of his sharp scrutiny.

On his part, Lee was even more curious regarding the head of the business. By this time he had heard a great many stories about "Mike," as Curran was known throughout the store; stories of his consuming wrath and his good-natured generosity; stories of his business acumen; many a hint of his bachelor "parties."

"There's one thing about Mike," advised Howard Doman. "He may try to scare you out of your wits; but what he really admires is a man who isn't afraid of him, and if he once likes you, he'll give you every cent he has in the world."

One stifling August afternoon, Lee received a peremptory message that Curran wanted to see him. Doman was out of the city, and there was no one else to whom he could go for counsel. He entered the president's office with inward quaking.

Michael Curran at this time was a man of nearly sixty years. His broad face was still ruddy with flamboyant health—though it was common opinion that he had aged considerably in the last two years. His big, round head and his belligerent, powerful neck betokened inexhaustible reservoirs of animal vigor. This intimation of crude physical force was carried out in his features: his small, gnarled nose and large nostrils; his broad, shrewd mouth; his powerful jaw.

It was only too apparent to Lee that Curran was in a truculent mood. His small, faded-blue eyes glinted dangerously.

"You're Laura Curran's protégé?" he began.

Lee endeavored to profit by Doman's hint. "Mrs. Curran is a very good friend of mine," he said quietly.

"Ye-ah." "Mike" snarled the word, rather than spoke it. He picked up a newspaper advertisement. "Did you write the copy for this clearance sale of summer suits?" he demanded.

Lee looked at the indicated portion of the advertisement.

"Yes, sir," he announced cheerfully. "Why?"

"Why?" Curran exploded. "It's rotten, that's why. D' you s'pose I pay good money for stuff like that?"

Lee contrived an optimistic smile. "I don't know. What's the matter with it?"

"Why, you poor idiot, you write as if you thought nobody but college professors read our ads. 'Monochrome,' 'prodigious,' 'attrition-proof,' 'velutinous,' 'lanate,' 'flocculent.'" Curran lingered over each word with increasing disgust.

He mispronounced all but one. "What sort of stuff d' you call that? What do them words mean?"

Lee grinned still more. "Search me."

Curran's lower jaw dropped in sheer surprise at Lee's effrontery. "Well, see you don't do it again," he finally said in tones that were almost meek, "or you'll lose your job—no matter who you got for friends. Write your ads so's I can understand every word. Hear me?"

Lee became very polite. "Yes, sir," he acquiesced.

When Doman returned, a day or two later, Lee sought the first opportunity for giving his chief a full account of the Curran interview.

"Well, that's certainly a good one," Doman chuckled. "And the best part of it is that you really got away with it. The first thing Mike said to me when I came back was: 'Say! That young Hillquit's either a fool or a hero.' He actually laughed about it. But at that, he was right about the ad being poor. Better lay off that Thesaurus stuff—big words only make people think you're trying to be smart."

Doman looked reminiscent. "Michael Curran would never have stood for any fresh talk like yours until a couple of years ago. I'm afraid he's beginning to slip back fast."

Lee listened eagerly whenever Doman flattered him with such confidential opinions.

"He's certainly had a remarkable career," he suggested.

The advertising manager seemed to be wondering how far he might trust his assistant.

"Yes," he finally agreed. "Mike Curran has one of the best natural business heads in the country. If he'd only had some sort of a chance when he was a kid, there'd have been no stopping him. As it is, he's just like a whole lot of other successful Americans. There are only two things in life that interest him: money and women. And I guess he's had more than his fair share of both."

Doman looked out of the window a moment. "But he's been losing his grip for quite a while now. Just between you and me, the store is retrogressing, too. Compared with some of the Chicago stores, it's a back number. The organisation is antiquated and the machinery is beginning to creak badly. There'll have to be a change before long, or it'll be too late."

Lee stared. He had always thought of Curran & Company as a Gibraltar of permanency.

"And there will be a change, Lee," Doman went on. "Mr. Curran can't last much longer—as the active head of the business, I mean. When he steps down, there's going to be a fight for his place—and that fight will be between Estabrook and me. Each of us will be backed by a third of the company's capital stock. Pete Curran and Mrs. Estabrook own one-sixth apiece, and they'll both be for Estabrook. I don't mind telling you that Mrs. Tom Curran will vote her one-third for me. The balance of power is Michael Curran's third—and just where he'll stand, nobody knows."

"Estabrook!" Lee broke out. "Why, he can't run the business. Every one knows that!"

"Estabrook doesn't know it." Doman smiled. "But as between him and me, I'm conceited enough to think I can do the better job. It's going to be a real fight, though, for Mike Curran's support. One thing's sure." Doman pounded the desk with his fist. "If I become the next head of this store, I'll do some housecleaning, by God. I'll make a clean sweep of most of these parasites that hold the fat jobs. I'll promote only the men who deserve promotion—and I'll have a loyal, hustling force of employés."

Doman stood up and paced up and down the office. "That may sound like strange doctrine, Lee. I'm willing to admit I've manipulated every wire I could lay my hands on in order to get where I am in the business to-day. You,

yourself, can't be entirely ignorant of the fact that you've had certain influences in your favor, too. But both of us really hate 'pull,' I guess. We'd much rather climb up on our own merits, if everybody else would do the same. I detest 'pull,' not only as a matter of principle, but because it's bad business. See how it clogs this store—hampers the business. Why, Detroit's beginning to grow like a house a-fire; yet Curran & Company is making less profit to-day than it did five years ago."

Presently the big advertising manager approached and laid his hand on Lee's shoulder.

"I'll be needing a few good men to help me," he said. "Can I count on you?"

Lee nodded.

"That's bully!" Doman let his hand rest on Lee's shoulder a second longer, then quickly reverted to routine matters.

This talk of Doman's opened Lee's eyes not a little. It gave him a real insight into the innermost workings of the store organisation. It explained Michael Curran, Estabrook, Doman himself. It made the whole situation intensely, humanly dramatic. It gave him definite stakes in the struggle that seemed imminent.

He thought of Doman a good deal in those days. There was something almost paternal in the older man's way of looking at him—something faintly sympathetic.

Lee wondered just how much truth there was in Barker's insinuation about Doman's friendship with Mrs. Curran.

IV

LEE devoted himself to his work throughout the summer and fall with such good results that in October Howard Doman officially appointed him assistant advertising manager and raised his salary to fifty dollars a week.

Altogether, it was a happy period in his life. His relations with Mrs. Curran troubled his mind to a certain extent, and he still felt a poignant heart-sickness over the loss of his first fine ideals. Not even his liking for Doman and his sympathy for his chief's ambitions could overcome his growing cynicism and suspicion of people's motives. He even caught himself involuntarily searching for selfish incentives in the advertising manager.

"Doman isn't different from anybody else," some small voice whispered. "He wants to be the head of this business, and he's friendly to you only because he thinks he can use you."

But such blemishes could not alter the fact that he was getting a keen pleasure out of his work. The psychology of advertising fascinated him. He was forever dramatising the significance of publicity. He liked to speculate on the effect of his "copy" upon various sorts of people. He came to know a rare joy in words—their athletic trimness, their suppleness, their slender symmetry, their power of suggestion. It was pure delight to have precisely the one and only word come leaping out from the back of his mind to greet his visualised idea.

He was conscious of a new buoyancy, too, in the feeling that he was now an assured success. If Howard Doman became the head of the store, Lee might hope to succeed

him as advertising manager. Even if Doman failed, Lee felt small anxiety about being able to keep his present position, at least.

It was good fun just to draw a check for one hundred dollars every fortnight, to have a checking account at the bank, to know for the first time in his life the caressing reassurance of expensive, tailor-made clothing, of distinctive haberdashery. He forsook his cheap boarding house and began to patronise the downtown cafés. He would gladly have moved to more luxurious rooms save for Bob Hamilton.

The bonds between his roommate and himself had become more and more irksome throughout the summer. Bob's early enthusiasm over his clerkship in the men's furnishings department had visibly waned after the first month. Gradually he became infected with the demoralising pessimism of the other salesmen. He came to see that Lee was an exception to the rule.

On his part, Lee constantly endeavored to help his roommate. He even arranged a conference between Bob and Howard Doman, but the advertising manager did not seem greatly impressed.

"Your friend hasn't any ideas," he told Lee.

Meanwhile, Bob's salary remained at twelve dollars a week. It was out of the question for him to pay a higher room-rent.

In his dissatisfaction with their quarters, Lee even suggested that he pay two-thirds of the rent of better rooms.

"No." Bob shook his head. "That's one thing I won't do, Lee." His voice became tremulous. "I wonder why it is I'm such a failure. It's an awful feeling. Sometimes I'm tempted to give up."

Lee would certainly have dissolved partnership, but for some residue of real sympathy for Bob. Selling socks from morning to night must be enough to depress any one. He

remembered also how deeply he himself had been hurt by Fred Badger's rebuff.

His work had kept Lee in the city throughout the summer. He had been home only three times—in April, over the Fourth of July, and one week-end in September.

These visits to Chatham brought him more pain than pleasure. He was deeply thankful that Vera lived in Record instead of Chatham. His mother could give him no news of her, except the common report that she seemed to "like being married real well." But every street in the village, every bend in the outlying country roads, each flickering kerosene street-lamp brought back unhappy memories.

Yet it was pleasant to renew acquaintances, to show the people of Chatham how famously he was getting on in the city. His mother took an enormous pride in his success. She wanted to know all about Mrs. Curran. It was evident that she expected him to become a second P. H. Taladay within another year or two. After his last visit, she mailed him a copy of the "Republican" containing a front-page eulogy of himself under the caption: "Chatham Boy Makes Good in Detroit."

One of his keenest pleasures had been to start paying back the sum his mother had loaned him. With his latest increase of salary, he calculated that he could speedily complete this repayment. He planned to do a great deal more. The old Hillquit house looked forbiddingly bleak and uncomfortable, especially in comparison with Mrs. Curran's home. His mother's health had been none too good lately, and he disliked the thought of her spending another winter in Chatham alone. He had about decided to insist on her coming to Detroit, at least until spring. It occurred to him that this plan would give him a good excuse for parting company with Bob.

But toward the end of October came an alarming letter from old "Doc" Thurber—the family physician, who had

assisted Lee into the world—stating that Mrs. Hillquit was seriously ill. "Looks like pneumonia," ventured Dr. Thurber with true professional cautiousness.

Lee telephoned Mrs. Curran and Howard Doman that night, and caught the early morning train for Chatham.

His mother was already very weak.

He stooped to kiss her—then, at the sight of her lying all alone in the bare, chilly bedroom, he suddenly started crying.

His mother looked up at him in perplexity. "Why—what's the matter? Nothing much wrong with me. I'll be up and around inside of two days."

Dr. Thurber came soon afterwards. Lee detected a specious gaiety in the physician's manner, and followed him out to his rig in the street.

"What about it, Doc?" he importuned. "I want the real facts."

The old physician's face showed grey with fatigue. He had been out in the country all night on a confinement case.

"Well, I dunno, boy," he hesitated, as he unhitched his horse. "Looks pretty bad. Trouble is, your mother wa'n't in very good shape to start with."

"But see here, Doc!" Lee exclaimed. "I want everything in the world done for her. If there are any other good doctors around here, get them in to consult with you. And I want a nurse. My mother shouldn't be lying there all alone that way."

"Nurse?" said Dr. Thurber. "There ain't a good one this side of Jackson. Maybe I can get hold of Mrs. Peters. She knows something 'baout nursin'." He climbed into his mud-spattered buggy. "I'll look 'round again to-night, boy."

Late that afternoon, Lee was summoned to the hotel for a long distance telephone call.

It proved to be Mrs. Curran, in search of the latest news. He told her, brokenly, what the situation was.

"Just what I thought," she said in the decided way he knew so well. "I know all about pneumonia, and nine-tenths of the battle is the proper sort of care. I'm going to send over Dr. Polk and the best nurse in Detroit on the morning train."

Lee walked back to his mother's house feeling more cheerful than he had all day. He was ashamed for any vague stirrings of resentment that had crept into his attitude toward Mrs. Curran. She was a splendid woman. He admired her decisiveness. And it was apparent that she cared a great deal for him.

Lee explained the new development to Dr. Thurber as diplomatically as possible, fearing to hurt the old physician's feelings.

"Glad to hear it," said the doctor. "Those city chaps have a chance to keep more brushed up on things than us country fellows. Besides, it sort of takes the responsibility off my shoulders."

Dr. Polk arrived the next noon, a brusque, important-looking specialist in diseases of the lungs.

"Open all these windows," was his first sharp command as he entered Mrs. Hillquit's bedroom.

Lee was very much relieved when the two physicians decided to be friendly. Dr. Polk left explicit directions, and took the afternoon train back to Detroit. The nurse, who had come with him, remained in the sick room.

"About a twenty-five per cent. chance," was the specialist's curt verdict to Lee, just before Dr. Thurber drove him to the station. "In the hospital, she'd have almost an even show."

His mother seemed alternately amused and troubled by all this attention.

"You're awfully good to me," she told him, "but it ain't a bit necessary to go to all this expense. I'll be on my feet before the end of the week."

This was on Wednesday. On Thursday, she became unconscious. Shortly before daybreak Saturday morning, the nurse woke him up with the news that his mother was dying.

The little bedroom seemed more forlorn than ever in the dim light from the shaded oil-lamp.

"There's nothing more I can do for the present," explained the tired nurse. "She may live several hours. When there's any change, call me."

Lee sat down by the bedside and waited.

His mother looked so natural that he could hardly believe the nurse's pronouncement. Her cheeks were very pale, but otherwise she seemed the same age-defying, undemonstrative New Englander. Thoughts of her tremendous self-sacrifices rushed over him—her love for him, her rare revelations of tenderness, her determination that he should go through college. And now she was dying—before he had achieved a real start toward making her old age comfortable—toward repaying in some measure the devotion of all those years. Bitter remorse for his countless sins of inconsiderateness, of neglect, sought out his heart.

The infinite pathos of it! A hot tear struck the back of his hand. It seemed to him his mother had never had a fair chance in life. Self-repression had been her enforced lot during most of her days. He wondered dimly—if a little more opportunity for joyousness, for radiant self-expression had come into her young womanhood—just how different an individual she would have been in the later years.

The Scheme of Things was malignantly, cruelly unjust.

A rooster crowed arrogantly in the distance, and the first faint prophecy of dawn challenged the lamp-light.

His mother gave a little complaining cry—as if an unpleasant dream were troubling her.

Lee smoothed her forehead with his hand.

At his touch, a smile trembled on the corners of her mouth. A smile that was girlish, whimsical, almost mis-

chievous—as if she were in the possession of some deeply humorous secret, which he could never hope to know.

Soon afterwards she died.

When Lee arrived in Detroit five nights later, Mrs. Holmes told him that Bob Hamilton had mysteriously disappeared several days before, taking his trunk with him.

"He left a letter upstairs for you," she said. "Course, you know, Mr. Hilton, I'll have to hold you responsible for all the rent from now on," she added apprehensively.

Lee climbed the stairway, closed the door of his room, lighted the gas table-lamp and slowly read Bob's note, written in the bold, uncompromising chirography his room-mate took such pride in:

"DEAR OLD LEE:

"I can't hold out any longer. The realisation that I'm a failure is too hard to stand. So I'm quitting. Dropping out of sight. Don't waste any time worrying about me.

"Please make up some yarn for the store people. I didn't tell them I was leaving. I suppose everybody will wonder. I've written the folks at home, so they won't bother you.

"You've been a true friend, Lee, and I want you to know I'll never forget it.

"BOB."

V.

LEE had been greatly surprised, in going through his mother's few effects, to come upon a life insurance policy for five thousand dollars, in which his mother had nominated him as sole beneficiary. He could not help marvelling at the thrift that had enabled her to keep up the premiums during the last few years.

A month later, he sold the house for a thousand dollars. This gave him a princely capital of six thousand dollars. Its effect upon his mental viewpoint was remarkable. The mere knowledge that he had so much money in the bank afforded him a certain elation, a new feeling of self-assurance. Involuntarily, he threw out his chest a little farther. It seemed incredible that he had been so poor eight short months ago.

As an investor, however, he was the veriest amateur. He would doubtless have contented himself with the three-and-a-half per cent. that the savings bank paid him, save for the fact that he inadvertently mentioned his new wealth to Mrs. Curran.

"I shouldn't leave it in the bank another day," she advised with her characteristic incisiveness.

"But I don't know what to do with it," he confessed.

Mrs. Curran considered the problem for a moment. "Well, you can always get six per cent. on your money, either from bonds or mortgages. That's what the bank is doing with your money. But you're a young man—with no one dependent on you. You can afford to take a chance, with a part of your money at least."

"But just where am I to invest it?" pursued Lee.

"Why, there are dozens of splendid chances lying around," she retorted. "You're like nearly everybody else. You're blind to Detroit's tremendous future. This city is just beginning to wake up. Automobiles aren't a fad. They've come to stay. And Detroit is the hub of the whole automobile business. Yet the average Detroiter goes droning along, satisfied with things as they are—absolutely dead to what's in the very air. But to the few people with vision and a little nerve, all this preliminary bustle means an enormous growth. I tell you, Lee, Detroit is going to double in size within the next ten years; and that means wealth to every wise investor."

She tapped the arm of the davenport with her small, black fan. "Now in your case—why not invest, say half of your money, in real estate. Downtown real estate. Of course, you can't touch any Woodward avenue frontage, but some of the side streets, like Broadway or Bagley, or even Woodward avenue three or four blocks above the Park—they're quite possible. Buy on time—ten or fifteen per cent. down—just as much frontage as you can get for your three thousand dollars. You can save enough from your salary to keep up the payments. You can't go wrong. I shouldn't be surprised if all downtown property tripled in value in three years. That would mean over a thousand per cent. profit to you. At any rate, you can't lose. It's a perfectly safe investment."

Lee listened spell-bound as Mrs. Curran unrolled this alluring vista before his eyes.

"With your other three thousand, you can afford to take a chance," she went on. "Personally, I think there's still time to get in on the automobile business. I own stock in two companies already, and I'm planning on a third."

This third company, she explained, was just in process of organisation. A young Detroit automobile worker, Alfred Durham, had evolved a new design for a car, and was strug-

gling to finance a company. After more than a year's discouraging effort, he had secured stock subscriptions of forty thousand dollars—part of them to be paid in automobile parts. Durham needed twenty thousand dollars more. Mrs. Curran planned to put in ten thousand.

"Of course it's a gamble," she admitted. "Durham has what looks like an original design. Two of his ideas I like very much: the low price of the car; and the fact that there will be just one model. He's counting on a large output, with a small profit on each car—which is certainly good sense. But whether he has any business head, I don't know. I suspect some of us will have to watch him pretty closely."

Lee was by nature somewhat timorous about money matters, and his first six months in Detroit had accentuated this conservatism. It cost him an unmistakable pang to draw his six thousand dollars from the bank.

Yet he could not fail to be impressed with Mrs. Curran's sound business judgment. She possessed vision, without seeming visionary. He persuaded himself that the city was on the threshold of an amazing growth, an extraordinary boom.

In the end, he took thirty one-hundred-dollar shares of stock in the Durham Motor Car Company, with an option on an additional twenty shares. After some investigation, he paid three thousand dollars down on a thirty-foot Broadway frontage, occupied by a ramshackle frame dwelling, payment of the balance of twenty-seven thousand dollars to be completed within five years.

At times, he would become almost panic-stricken at the thought of his new obligations. To save his life, he could not see where the necessary money was coming from. Shortly after Bob Hamilton's disappearance, he had taken two small rooms in a Jefferson avenue apartment-hotel. His meals and his clothing were both costing him more. His whole scale of living had assumed a higher plane. He gave

every outward evidence of being a prosperous and successful young business man.

That winter also marked Lee's first timid approach to the outer fringes of that sacred preserve labelled "Society." And oddly enough, it was Mrs. Curran who stood sponsor for him.

"I think you ought to know some nice people," was her abrupt introduction of the subject. "Some nice girls, for example."

Lee was taken wholly unawares. The prospect roused vague, pleasurable curiosities in him.

"But why?" he thought it behooved him to inquire.

"Because it's natural that you should want to know some younger people. No, I shan't be jealous," she smiled, at his gestured protest. "Also, it will stop any silly talk about you and me."

"Let them talk!" Lee defied with meretricious boldness.

"So you still believe in running your head against stone walls?" She became more serious. "No, my dear, my way is much better—really. You'll learn to make compromises, too, some day. And our love is so fine, so secure, that I shan't worry at all about losing you."

It occurred to him that he was still in mourning.

"I know," she agreed. "It would hardly be good form for you to go to dances, for example. But there are other things, not quite so gay."

Lee made his *début* at Mrs. Curran's reception on New Year's afternoon. He felt very *gauche* most of the time. The big, old-fashioned house was jammed with people he had never seen before, and he fancied that every one was looking askance at him. Most of the men wore frock coats. Lee's business suit was manifestly in bad taste. The women impressed him as being splendid, but explosive.

The excuse for the reception was Mrs. Curran's niece, Miss Barbara Mayo. Lee took his place in the line feeling

more out of place than ever. He discovered that he had no gloves on his hands.

Finally he reached the reception line. A tall, bald-headed major-domo next to Mrs. Curran asked him his name. But before he could answer, Mrs. Curran saw him.

"How do you do?" she greeted him warmly. "Barbara, let me present Mr. Hillquit."

Miss Mayo, resplendent in pink, retained her consciously arch smile.

"Not *the* Mr. Hillquit?" she importuned.

Before Lee could investigate this interesting inquiry, he was shunted on past the receiving line.

He hovered about miserably for a time, dashing to and from the punch-bowl with an air of just having left some one.

At last the reception line dissolved, and he sought out Mrs. Curran.

"There are some people I want you to meet," she said presently.

He was introduced to a stout, voluble woman and her two daughters.

"Do you dance, Mr. Hillquit?" asked Mrs. Jack Reynolds.

Lee explained.

"Too bad." Mrs. Reynolds shook her head. "Renée is giving a party on the sixteenth."

He was quite overwhelmed with both girls; but Renée Reynolds was much more striking than her sister. Betty Reynolds' neck was obviously long, he detected. Renée had a sparkling, vivacious quality. Her eyes were provocative, her teeth a flash of white. He suspected that the high color of her cheeks was partly artificial, but somehow the rouge went well with the rest of her, enhanced the vivid contrast between her skin and the white furs about her throat.

Unmistakably, she was everything a "Society girl" should

be. It seemed unbelievable that they should be talking together in this easy way. More than that, Miss Renée's manner evinced that she found him interesting. She stood quite close, and chatted gaily up at him. Lee's manner became more ingratiating. He even essayed a clever epigram or two, and found her prompt mirth both gratifying and adorable.

At length he had a sudden inexplicable instinct to look around. His quick glance caught Mrs. Curran regarding him intently from across the room. But before he could decipher her expression, she returned her attention to the small knot of people about her.

Simultaneously two impeccable youths swooped down on Renée Reynolds. Their playful manner revealed that they knew her very well.

"What time did you break away last night, Freddie?"

"Who is the girl over there with Jim Studdiford?"

"How *perfectly screaming!*"

Such bits of intelligence made Lee realise that he was by no means a certified member as yet of that fascinating and superior world to which he aspired.

It formed no part of the three's code of manners to talk about general topics, so that he might join in. In fact, the two young men may be said to have ignored him.

Presently he excused himself.

"I'm terribly glad to have met you," said Renée. "I hope I'll see you again soon."

When he said good-bye to Mrs. Curran, she looked at him with what appeared to be casual interest. "How did you like the Reynolds girls?"

Lee hesitated between enthusiasm and lukewarmth. "They seemed very nice," he compromised.

"They *are* nice," she corroborated. "Not very much money, I guess, but nice. Betty came out three years ago, and Renée two." She shook her head in mock alarm.

"Better watch out! Brilliant young business men like you aren't any too safe."

In spite of his protests, Lee was pleased.

A week later, he received an invitation to Renée Reynolds' house-dance.

"But I told her mother I wasn't dancing this winter," he objected to Mrs. Curran.

His patroness smiled enigmatically. "I said the same thing to Mrs. Reynolds when she 'phoned me for your address. But an invitation, whether accepted or declined, presupposes a party call. I'm really afraid you'll have to go and see Miss Renée."

This impressed Lee as a pleasant necessity, though he did not say so.

In due time, he made his first call at the Reynolds' home. He tingled with self-consciousness; it seemed an event of vast portent.

The inexplicable part of the evening was Renée's obvious good opinion of him. She was too simple-minded—or too gracious—to comprehend the vast gulf that yawned between herself, a "Society girl," and her caller, a mere outsider.

Her chief conversational purpose related to the discovery of mutual friends. Lee was ashamed to admit his woeful lack of acquaintance with people whom impliedly he should have known. It cost him a pang, also, to confess that he had not been a fraternity man at the University.

In an attempt to rehabilitate his standing, he swallowed his pride and mentioned Fred Badger.

"Oh, do you know Fred?" Renée dimpled. "And have you met Helene Rutgers, the girl he's engaged to?"

Lee was compelled to divulge his ignorance of Fred's engagement, but he was aware that the mere mention of his former friend's name had helped his case.

When he took his leave, he felt that he had made considerable progress.

"Do you play bridge?" Renée asked.

He professed a slovenly game.

"I doubt that." She held out her hand. "Anyway, I'm going to call you up some time when I want an extra man."

Later on, at Mrs. Curran's suggestion, he took Renée to the theatre and a concert. It amazed him that she should be willing to risk her social standing by appearing with him. Not only that—she actually seemed delighted to accept his invitations. Somehow it added to his stature. Perhaps he had been underestimating himself socially—just as he had formerly belittled his business ability. Perhaps—miraculously enough—he had the makings of a "Society man" within himself.

From then on, he called once or twice a month at the Reynolds' house. And one unforgettable evening, Renée and he began calling each other by their first names.

But these calls by no means completed the cycle of Lee's social activities.

"If I were you," advised Mrs. Curran, "I shouldn't devote myself exclusively to Renée Reynolds. In Detroit, it requires ridiculously little to start engagement rumors."

So Lee made a few dutiful calls on Miss Barbara Mayo, whose interest in him never passed the languid stage. Nevertheless, she did invite him to a very small and select dinner-and-theatre party; and Lee, for the first time in his life, had the indescribable thrill of seeing his name in the sacred column labelled "Society." Every newspaper in the city displayed the news. A dozen of his acquaintances at the store—with new respect in their eyes—told him they had read of the important event. And Lee, remembering the eagerness with which he had scanned the self-same column only a year ago, could well understand their awe.

VI

THE printed announcement of Miss Barbara Mayo's theatre party had at least one other distinct aftermath. At least Lee always connected the two happenings.

It was but two days later when he recognised Fred Badger's cordial accents on the telephone.

"Where in the world have you been keeping yourself?" he demanded. "It's a wonder you wouldn't let your friends see you once in a while."

"I guess you know why I haven't looked you up," Lee recovered himself sufficiently to retort.

Fred expressed complete perplexity, and when Lee continued evasive, he came up to the office.

Finally, Lee reminded him of the painful incident at the symphony concert.

Fred's aggressive face indicated pained incredulity. "Do you mean to say you thought I intentionally cut you?"

It did seem rather preposterous. "But I spoke to you, and you looked right at me," justified Lee.

"So that was why you dropped me." Fred seemed very much cut up over Lee's poor opinion of him. "Well, I give you my word of honor I didn't hear you and didn't see you."

Some considerable fraction of Lee's faculties remained unconvinced. A new, calculating instinct, however, bade him accept the olive branch. Fred's friendship would be of intrinsic value; he could help Lee both socially and in business.

Lee held out his hand. "It's all over now anyway, Fred," he announced. "I understand you're to be congratulated—on your engagement, I mean."

Fred seemed pleased. "Can't you come to lunch with me?" he inquired. "I'll tell you all about it."

He took Lee to the University Club, and dilated upon his plans with his old frankness. From his description, Lee identified Helene Rutgers as the resplendent young woman he had seen at the symphony concert.

"She belongs to one of the five best families in Detroit," Fred asserted. "There were at least ten other men after her. You must meet her sometime."

"The last time I saw you," Lee ventured, "you were in favor of picking out a girl with money."

"Money, *or* social position," corrected Fred. "Helene hasn't any money, but she has relatives who are in the millionaire class." He knocked off his cigar ash. "By the way, I'm glad you followed my advice and broke off things with that girl in your home town."

Lee flushed. "Who told you that?"

"Nobody told me." Fred laughed. "If you were still engaged, I guess you wouldn't be travelling around with Barbara Mayo and Cutie Reynolds."

Lee's flush became one of pleasure. Evidently his successes were matters of common knowledge. He hoped Fred didn't know about Mrs. Curran. And he wondered why he referred to Renée as "Cutie."

Fred talked incessantly about his forthcoming marriage. Lee could not help noticing that his friend did not once speak of Helene in terms of real affection. The investment aspect of the matter seemed uppermost in his mind; how enormously Helene's relatives could help him in business. This, and the impressiveness of his achievement in out-distancing all other competitors for her hand.

After that, Fred talked still more of himself; about the

remarkable bond sales he was "putting over"; how shrewd a "trader" he had become. Older bond salesmen might strive in vain to "cut in" on him.

"I'm just like a rubber ball," Fred illustrated. "The minute they think they have me down, up I bounce again."

Lee discounted Fred's estimate of himself very little. It seemed to him that his friend must be well-nigh irresistible; and Fred's handsome, forceful appearance and his noticeably modish clothes corroborated his claims to prosperity. In comparison, Lee's own success appeared hardly worth mentioning.

"And by the way," Fred mentioned casually, "if you or any of your friends ever have any money that isn't working, I can probably get you in on the ground floor of some good proposition."

Lee thanked him. He was almost sorry he had invested in real estate and automobile stocks, so alluring did his friend's account of the financial world sound to him.

Fred's flattering display of friendship did not cease with the lunch at the University Club. A few Sundays later, he took Lee to tea at his fiancé's house.

Helene Rutgers lived in a brick house on Jefferson avenue. The house itself was far from being prepossessing; but by this time Lee had absorbed the idea that people could live in any sort of a structure they wanted to, as long as they possessed that elusive something called "social position." He was prepared to be impressed with the house and all of its appurtenances. The very fact that it was occupied by such exclusive people lent it an air of majesty.

Helene Rutgers herself was by no means beautiful, somewhat to his surprise. Her face was thin, and her features unmistakably sharp. Her small mouth sagged a little at the corners. Her eyes had a tendency to stare. Yet Lee vaguely realised at once that she had "style." Her coiffure,

for example, was simple, but indefinitely effective. Her gown had "lines."

Her manner toward Lee—in fact, toward every one—was indolent, slightly bored. She permitted herself no enthusiasms. She endured the naïveté, the ingenuousness, of younger or less perfectly cultured persons with languid tolerance.

This must be the mark of good breeding, Lee concluded. It occurred to him that Renée Reynolds' vivacity might conceivably be bad taste.

It became apparent that the Rutgers' house was a meeting place for fashionables. At least a dozen people dropped in for tea. Lee found it almost impossible to manipulate his cup, saucer and plate with any degree of deftness, and he committed the embarrassing mistake of rising when the maid offered him cake. Otherwise, he acquitted himself with passable credit.

Every time a newcomer arrived, there was a re-grouping of the tea-drinkers. After a time, Lee found himself sitting next to a girl whom he could not recall having met.

"Never mind trying to remember my name," she surprised him by saying. "Fred completely forgot to introduce you—the darling boy!"

There was so much venom in her last words that Lee, for the first time that afternoon, was shocked clear out of his self-consciousness.

He stared at the girl. As far as externals went, it was obvious that she "belonged." She was nice-looking, he decided. Her blue eyes did not impress him as beautiful, but they were at least clear and unequivocal. He liked her nose: it was perfectly straight and it came out from her forehead at precisely the proper angle. She had a good, firm mouth—perhaps a little too wide.

But her expression was decidedly cynical, and she was evidently a rather disagreeable person.

"What do you do for a living—make automobiles?" she demanded.

Lee determined to maintain the social amenities at all costs.

"No, I'm only an advertising man," he said.

Genuine interest lighted up her face for an instant. "That's a relief! Every new man one meets nowadays is in the automobile business. What's more, he knows nothing but automobiles—can talk nothing but automobiles. I get so sick of it."

What was the matter with the girl? Lee looked at her uneasily, and wished that some one might come to relieve him. He perceived Fred Badger watching him out of the corner of his eye.

"Awfully attractive tea-party," he remarked inanely.

"Yes, isn't it?" She laughed contemptuously. "Such original and intelligent conversation! Such brainy people! It's all so sincere—so free from hypocrisy—so free from banality!"

At the first opportunity, Lee made inquiries of Fred Badger.

"Oh, that's my sister, Eleanor," said Fred in a manner that was manifestly apologetic. "Don't pay any attention to what she says. She's been having queer streaks lately."

Clearly enough, she was not popular. Lee watched her standing a little apart from the others—an unhappy, brooding and openly rebellious spirit.

VII

IN the midst of such social achievements and business successes, Lee realised all at once how repulsive his relations with Mrs. Curran had become.

Yet it seemed to him that he was bound to her by a hundred indissoluble ties. There were certain material obligations, such as her influence in his behalf at the store and her sponsorship for him socially. But more than this, she had been kind to him in countless intangible ways—dispatching the specialist and nurse to his mother's bedside, for example. Such favors could neither be repaid nor forgotten.

He had known Mrs. Curran just a year. Nine months had passed since the surprising dénouement on the little side porch. At first, his gratitude, his real tenderness toward her, his feeling that he must protect her from malicious gossip, had combined to cloak the purely physical. Mrs. Curran herself laid the accent on the spiritual, to start with; and if she had persisted in this strain, Lee's feelings might never have suffered their present painful revulsion. But by fall, she talked little of the fineness of exalted love. She seemed to take their relationship as an established fact. Lee began to suspect, in a horrified way, that her plea of spirituality had been a pretence from the beginning. Even her voice took on a new physical flavor; her touch subtly gave the lie to her diminishing professions of highmindedness; her manner became slightly proprietorial.

His sense of obligation to her accentuated the odium of the situation. She still held his fortunes in the hollow of

her hand. He began to think of their relations as the price of his success. A profound sense of physical degradation tormented him—tainted the pleasure he felt in his work, clouded his elation over his social achievements.

A dozen times, perhaps, he brought himself to the point of breaking things off, but each time his resolutions wilted miserably. Mrs. Curran's enmity might prove a serious thing. Suppose, for example, she brought about his discharge at the store. That would mean he could make no more payments on his real estate, would forfeit the money he had already invested. His stock in the Durham Motor Car Company had no value as yet. With his position gone and his capital wiped out, he would be compelled to begin the disheartening fight with poverty all over again.

But to his credit, this fear played but small part in his irresolution. He still felt sincerely grateful to Mrs. Curran, and at times he liked her immensely. Her affectations of girlishness sickened him, yet he could sense the pathos of her situation. Like most men, he was naturally timid in such a pass. Somehow he could not bring himself to hurting her feelings. He was largely to blame; he had let her think he loved her in that way.

It came over him that no matter how he loathed his rôle, he must keep on indefinitely, smiling and playing the ardent, insatiable lover. And he forced himself to do so. But the process seemed to squeeze his very soul dry, to leave it arid and desolate.

It was at this stage that Ellwood James once more bobbed serenely into his life.

Lee, dining in lonesome fashion in a hotel café one night, suddenly felt some one's hands over his eyes.

"Give it up," he finally said. Then he recognised Ellwood's laugh.

"Having dinner all alone? What luck!" exclaimed the effervescent young physician. "D' you mind if I join you?"

Lee roused himself from his morbid thoughts. Ellwood's spontaneity, his gaiety, seemed unspeakably grateful.

"My word! What's the matter with you, old top?" the irrepressible youth demanded. "You look all in."

Lee blamed over-work.

"Go on!" derided Ellwood. "You've been crossed in love. Take it from me, Lee: she isn't worth it. The only way to forget one girl is to take up with another." He winked joyously. "Or are you still as sanctimonious about women as ever?"

Lee made no reply, but his companion's philosophy sank in. He looked at Ellwood more closely. The young doctor seemed as carefree and happy-go-lucky as ever. Lee searched vainly for signs of dissipation. Ellwood's eyes, perhaps, appeared a little tired, and there was a gossamer line or two underneath. Otherwise he was more radiantly youthful than ever.

They had one or two cocktails, and Lee's spirits rose. After all, Ellwood was a likable chap, and he seemed to admire Lee for some obscure reason. He was warm-hearted too, and generous. He took Lee out of himself.

Presently he glanced at his watch.

"I have a date," he announced. "What about it? Shall we make it a foursome?"

Lee was chiefly conscious of a dread of being left alone. He nodded. "Can you fix it without much trouble?"

"Easiest thing I do," the young doctor asserted, and vanished into a telephone booth.

Ellwood had a new touring car, it developed, in place of the late, lamented "Lizzie." "I call this one Gertrude," he puffed as he spun the motor.

"Gertrude" proved herself far speedier than her predecessor—and considerably more commodious. Ellwood and his girl sat on the front seat; and Lee and his fair companion had the tonneau to themselves.

He did not particularly like the "extra girl" who had been secured for him, but Ellwood's innamorata made an immediate impression on him. She was very young looking and her eyes—what he had seen of them—were genuinely attractive. Her name was Dolores McGovern.

They rode around in desultory fashion for an hour or two. Ellwood and Dolores kissed each other frequently, and when the traffic was light, Ellwood put one arm around her. Their displays of affection were open and quite unembarrassed. Lee became restive. He rather envied Ellwood. At the same time, he was not quite sure what advances he ought to make toward his own girl. He hated not coming up to expectations.

"What makes you two so quiet?" Ellwood demanded and peered around. "Well, would you look at them!" he exclaimed. "Why don't you get a little clubby?"

Lee ventured to put his arm around Miss Pearl Hoover. She let her head fall on his shoulder with apparent contentment.

"I thought you didn't like me," she said.

The implication of her upturned face was sufficiently clear, and he kissed her. But his eyes were all for Dolores McGovern.

Towards ten o'clock, Ellwood pointed "Gertrude" downtown.

"Where'll we go?" he asked them.

Dolores promptly designated the hotel café where Lee and Ellwood had dined.

Ellwood appeared hesitant. "Oh, I don't like that place. It's so dead. You can't have any fun there. Let's go to 'The Royal'."

"'The Royal'!" Dolores received the suggestion with open contempt. "Say, listen! What do you take me for?"

Ellwood laughed. "It's always suited you up to now."

In spite of her repeated refusals, he drove the machine to

"The Royal," and Dolores finally yielded. But she seemed sullen over the affair, and Ellwood himself developed some asperity. This put a damper on the party.

"The Royal" was noisy and crowded. Ellwood ordered two rounds of cocktails, and Lee was inexplicably relieved when the girls refused his third invitation. His admiration for Dolores continued to grow. She was rather small and very youthful—not more than eighteen. She had finely cut features. His first intimation about her eyes proved well justified; they were really beautiful—a soft grey. And she had personality. She was not negative, like Lee's girl. After her first sulkiness, she talked a great deal, expressed positive opinions about everything under the sun, and displayed a lively sense of humor.

She looked at Lee in an impressed way that sent a thrill through him. "I've seen you somewhere before," she declared.

When they came out on the street, Dolores darted into the tonneau seat.

"Here! Come out of there!" commanded Ellwood.

"Nothing doing!" asserted Dolores. "I'm through with you."

"Don't be silly!" interposed Lee's girl.

Lee was silent with astonishment, but his heart was beating hard.

Ellwood hesitated. "Oh, very well—suit yourself!" he said. "You'll ride with me, won't you, Pearl?"

Lee's girl seemed not unwilling to change men. She promptly kissed Ellwood, and they all started off.

Dolores sat close to Lee. "I'm off Ellwood James for life," she confided.

"Why?" asked Lee.

"Oh, he makes me sick, taking me to cheap places. The last time I asked him to take me to the hotel, he said it might hurt my reputation to be seen there—and to-night,

he says it's too dead. I'm wise to him bigger'n a house. He's afraid some of his swell girls will see him there with me. He's a nice fellow in some ways—only he thinks he can kiss his way through life, I guess."

She had an afterthought. "Besides, I like you better."

"I wonder where I've seen you," she went on. "Do you go to the Fellowship Club dances?"

Lee decided it was her extreme youthfulness that appealed to him so irresistibly.

Ellwood kissed Pearl good-night, but Lee merely shook hands with Dolores. She was too nice, too unusual, for casual familiarities.

She seemed a little puzzled. "Call me up soon," she whispered.

Ellwood drove away silently.

"Sorry about your row with Dolores," Lee propitiated.

The youthful physician smiled. "Oh, that's all right. It wasn't your fault. She's an attractive kid, but too damned stubborn. Go as far as you like. I'm done with her."

"What sort of a girl is she?" asked Lee.

"Oh, all girls of that class are alike," Ellwood set forth. "Some of them take longer than others, that's all. As far as Dolores is concerned—well, you can't prove anything by me. But don't you go getting serious about her. She's just an ordinary little Mick—darned good looking, and full of the devil—but not to be taken hard."

The next morning, on his way through the fur department in search of the buyer, Lee ran full tilt into Dolores.

"For the love of Mikel!" she exclaimed. "Do you work here too?"

Lee nodded, and instinctively looked around. There was no one in the immediate vicinity.

Dolores made no secret of her disappointment. "What department you in?"

"Advertising."

"Oh!" Her relief was apparent. "I thought maybe you were a ribbon clerk."

Their acquaintance developed rapidly. For a time Lee believed he was in love with her. Her youth, her real attractiveness drew him to her mightily. Their love-making never went beyond certain fairly innocent bounds.

Dolores had a shrewd code of ethics all her own. "I have to go out nights," she insisted. "If I stay home, I just get morbid. A girl in my position has got to do some things, in order to be popular with fellows at all. That's one reason I like to go out with you—it's such a relief to be let alone—not to be pawed over every minute."

The men in Detroit were "awful," she thought. "A girl can't walk a block on Woodward avenue without three or four fish-faces trying to pick her up. And they all want the same thing. Sometimes I'm disgusted with myself—there must be something wrong about me to put such ideas in men. But all the other girls have the same trouble. Fellows get fresh with them the first night they meet them."

"Innocence!" she burst out one time. "Say, listen! I guess you won't find any of that around this burg." Yet she maintained infrangible rules governing men's conduct toward her. They might go so far—in fact, she rather expected every man to go that far. But beyond a certain line, they trespassed at their peril. "I slapped his face for him," she said of one young insurance agent. She cherished no resentment against a man for "getting fresh" once. "They all want to go as far as they can," she explained, "and you can't blame 'em." But if a man persisted, she told him to "beat it."

Lee learned unsuspected aspects of life at the Curran store. "Mike" Curran, according to Dolores, was a "bad one." He had made unmistakable advances to many of the girls, and if they proved stubborn, it was "good-bye to their jobs." Dolores had been in the store only two years, and

"Mike's" conduct was no longer so intolerable. "He's getting too old," was her cynical explanation of the improvement. But for a month or two, when she first came to work, he had made life miserable for her. One day, he had sent her up to the deserted stock room on some pretext, then followed her and tried to kiss her.

"I told him I'd scream if he didn't stop. 'Remember this,' he says, 'I'm paying you twelve dollars a week, and you're only worth six.' I told him I didn't care a damn for his dirty money, and to let me out of that room, or I'd tell the police. He said I was a little fool, but he finally let me go. Next week he cut my pay to eight dollars, and I've never had a raise since."

Other men around the store were "soft"—among them Harrison Estabrook. But they were all easily managed. "Stick a pin into a man's vanity, and you've got him where you want him," she said.

Toward men in general, indeed, her attitude was one of slightly contemptuous amusement. They had the distribution of most of the good things of life; they were to be placated, petted, "kidded," into doing nice things. "With three drinks and a little sympathy, any man will think he's in love," she declared. Dolores' real hatred was reserved for her own sex—especially the women customers at the store. "Nine out of ten of 'em act as if they knew you weren't straight—the patronisin' frumps. I could tell some of 'em a few nice stories about the men in their own families."

Lee marvelled at Dolores' sturdy powers of resistance; but he was in no mood for moral uplift these days. What he craved was some escape from the thought of his own unbearable situation with Mrs. Curran. Ellwood James supplied precisely this self-forgetfulness. He was never despondent. He was forever suggesting new and interesting exploits. He was unfailingly entertaining. He never

dragged in such depressing subjects as moral conscience or duty. To him, Life was a never-ending pursuit of fresh sensations.

Lee slowly absorbed the hedonistic viewpoint. His café life with Ellwood was developing into a definite and ever-growing habit. His experiments with women commenced—and not all of his affairs were as innocent as that with Dolores McGovern.

VIII

EIGHTEEN full months dragged wearily by before he could bring himself to face the issue with Mrs. Curran.

Meanwhile, life took on a nightmarish quality for him. He did his work at the store in a perfunctory, uninspired way, and by the fall of 1910, he was drawing four thousand dollars a year. He continued his social activities in desultory fashion. Fred Badger honored him by appointing him an usher for his wedding.

But the hypocrisy of his position, his sense of stultification and physical uncleanness, galled him cruelly. The only surcease came from the self-forgetfulness that Ellwood James dispensed. Novelty of sensation—a new girl, a new game of the sexes—that was the prescription!

The wonder of it was that Mrs. Curran did not detect his soreness of spirit long before the end. Sometimes he was almost openly crabbed. But she refused to quarrel with him on any pretext, always offered him sympathy for his troubles instead of indignation. If he lost his temper, she put him in the wrong by remaining silent. But underneath her soft-voiced extenuations, he sensed the steely quality of her insistence.

Toward the finish, he slighted her openly once or twice. She palliated his offences, as usual; but the last Sunday before his summer vacation, he found ensconced in her drawing room the self-same æsthetic-looking person with whom he had seen her at the art gallery. Heretofore, she had closed the doors on Sunday to every one but Lee.

This crude attempt to arouse his jealousy filled him

with an even greater antipathy toward his enforced intimacy with her.

A morning or two later, Howard Doman summoned him to his office.

"I want to have a serious talk with you," he began. His friendly smile did not wholly conceal the gravity of his expression.

"Your work for the last six months has been very mediocre, Lee," he went on. "There's no life in it—no spontaneity—no imagination. It's mechanical. You aren't having any fun doing it. Now I want to know what the trouble is."

Lee remained silent.

Doman's interrogative eyes searched his assistant's face. "It isn't business," he puzzled. "You're evidently dissipating a good deal, but a chap of your type only dissipates to escape something else."

Lee shook his head despairingly. "Yes, you're quite right, Mr. Doman. But I can't tell you anything about it."

"It's really none of my affair," said Doman kindly. "But I fancy I can guess what the situation is."

Lee looked up quickly.

"You're leaving to-morrow for your vacation," said his chief. "I want you to stay away a month and just rest. And when you come back, I want you to cut yourself loose. You understand, I think. Remember this: It's splendid to be considerate of people's feelings, but a man owes some duty to himself. Anything that throttles his finest possibilities, he must destroy at all costs."

During his vacation, Lee meditated constantly on Doman's advice. Did his friend really fathom the situation? Was it within the bounds of possibility that he had undergone the very same experience with Mrs. Curran?

At all events, Lee came back to the city with the fixed resolve of terminating the odious relationship; and the first

night of Mrs. Curran's return from Maine, early in October, he told her that he no longer loved her.

They were sitting on the big red davenport in front of the fire. As he checked the gladness of her homecoming mood and began his broken recital, his eyes involuntarily took note of Mrs. Curran's left hand lying on the end of the familiar salmon-colored scarf that draped itself across the edge of the davenport. Her slim fingers, incarnadined by the fire-light, tapped the cloth reflexively. Then, all at once, as his meaning became clear, the tapping of her fingers was arrested; her whole hand seemed to shrink and collapse, like a suddenly deflated toy balloon.

Somehow he finished and sat waiting. It was over at last. And now for the painful scene!

He looked up from that pathetic left hand. Mrs. Curran's eyes were closed, and a rather set smile just touched her lips.

"I rather expected this," she said at last. "It's all perfectly obvious to me—I forgot to make a game out of it. I forgot to conceal." Her bitter smile returned.

Genuine compunction was fast overtaking Lee. "I'm awfully sorry," he said. "You have meant a great deal to me. You have been so generous——"

Then he—he who had dreaded her tears—abruptly broke down himself.

Presently her hand rested on his.

"I know," she said. "It's hard, but it's so destined. It has been so destined from the beginning."

He experienced a wild impulse to tell her that he had been mistaken, that he wanted things to go on between them.

"There is some one else?" she asked.

He lied outright. "Yes."

"Of course I knew such happiness couldn't go on forever," she said. She talked slowly, as if it hurt her. "Somehow it isn't so hard to lose you because you've fallen in

love with some young girl. That's natural. I'm grateful for having had you as long as I have. If you had simply grown sick of me, I don't think I could have endured it."

Lee gradually recovered his poise. "Can you forgive me?" he importuned.

She even smiled—happily, not bitterly—as if at pleasant recollections.

"Dear boy," she answered, "you're the finest man I've ever known. If there's any forgiveness to be asked, I am the one to seek it. I don't suppose I had any right to take what you've given me. Probably you'll think hard things of me—if you haven't already. I hope I haven't harmed you very much. Do try to think kindly of me. I was very lonely."

A log crashed down between the brass andirons amidst a shower of sparks.

"Very lonely," she repeated slowly. "You see—I've never had any children. The one thing in life I wanted most, I couldn't have. Do you understand?"

He was conscious that all his smouldering resentment had vanished utterly. For the first time in his life, he caught the view of a human being inescapably caught in the web of circumstance. The exigencies, the thwarted instincts, the infelicities of her life had fashioned her as she was. And never after that could he quite return to his former conception of personal blame. People were puppets, at the mercy of Fate. Only fools prated of moulding Destiny.

He felt poignant regrets for some of the ugly thoughts he had cherished toward her. Her real fineness, her almost maternal tenderness put him to the blush.

"Come and see me often—after a while," she whispered, as they said good-night. "And don't forget—there's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you."

As Lee reached the sidewalk, he turned for a last look.

Mrs. Curran still stood silhouetted in the open doorway.

—a lonely, ineffably forlorn figure—gazing out after him.

But he might have spared himself all his pity for her loneliness. A fortnight later, he spied his successor lolling in the Curran limousine—a dreamy-eyed, sensitive young fellow; by all signs an idealist, even as Lee himself had been, years ago it seemed.

IX

LEE had imagined that his unhappy situation with Mrs. Curran was the sole cause of his desire for the commodities that Ellwood James supplied. For a month or two, he led a quiet, normal existence.

Then a strange phenomenon brought itself to his attention.

He began to realise that his intrigue carried an aftermath—a desolating restlessness that was almost physical, a certain indefinable craving. Little by little, he perceived how the experience had warped and twisted him. He had the feeling of being emotionally gutted.

Then Ellwood reappeared, offering the anodyne of bright eyes, bright lights and cocktails.

During that winter and spring, "Gertrude's" snub nose poked its way into devious paths; "Gertrude's" red tail-light gleamed almost nightly on the down-town streets and in dubious alleys.

Life seemed a fairly simple equation to Ellwood. Happiness, he claimed, was solely a question of bodily well-being. "If you're feeling fit, you're happy. If you're tired out, you're blue. Whenever I feel low, I know I need a good rest, and I simply take a week off—stay in bed twelve hours a day. Then I'm like a fighting cock again. Of course, I'm not talking about real happiness. I can count the times I've been really happy on the fingers of one hand. The happiness I mean is escape from boredom. That kind of happiness I can get any time with a few drinks and my newest girl sitting across the table. How many of your wise men have so simple and sure a recipe?"

"How did you happen to get started as a woman-hunter?" Lee once asked him.

"Well, it's rather curious." Ellwood looked around the noisy café reflectively. "Being a doctor was what did it. I don't believe a man really knows women unless he's in the medical game. An office full of ailing females every day. That's not the point, though. A good many women demand personal familiarity from a doctor. Sounds caddish, doesn't it—but it's true. Just as one of 'em once said to me: 'We like to be petted!' And if you don't pet them, they up and go to some doctor who will. It used to make me sick, but after a while, I got to be pretty good at it. I got the habit of doing it."

He laughed a little shame-facedly. "Naturally, it's no fun fussing over women who're paying you to do it. But when you've left the business behind, and can do your love-making where you want—well, Lee, it's the one thing in life that never grows stale. You can get bored to tears with everything else—friends, tobacco, food, even drink—but each new pair of good-looking eyes is a fresh challenge. A little silk, a little scent—I know it's all a fake, but I'm not so fossilised I can resist the lure of it. And the game is fun for the girl, too. Most women want to be mastered. And every once in so often, you find some girl you can never quite catch—and you go through life worshipping her memory. Funny, isn't it?"

Lee felt immensely drawn to the young physician at times. There was a warmth, an appealing generosity, about him. His sense of humor was unflaggingly entertaining; his ingenuity in searching out novelty was incredible; his supply of new girls inexhaustible.

He had his more serious aspects, too. He would drop all frivolity on the instant, if a professional case obtruded.

Late one night in a café, a Greek 'bus-boy bearing a heavy

tray stumbled over a table-leg and gashed his temple on the tile floor.

"Dirty little pig!" vituperated the "captain," and nudged the 'bus-boy with his shoe.

Lee never beheld hotter rage than Ellwood's. He threw the surprised head-waiter aside, and for a moment it was pitch-and-toss whether there would be a free-for-all fight. Then Ellwood picked the 'bus-boy up in his arms and carried him to the hospital. He had completely forgotten about Lee and the two girls.

Ellwood's hands were long-fingered, deft-looking—ideal hands for a surgeon. His very appearance in a sick room must have worked wonders with his few patients.

Another quality that endeared him to Lee was his fierce hatred of sham. Of Fred Badger, for example, he said: "There are three kinds of city liars: the man who lies about his conquests with women; the man who lies about his victorious fist-fights with other men; and the man who lies about how much money he's making. Fred Badger is the third variety. He may be worlds better than I am. I'm a bad egg, all right, and I live off my father. But at any rate, I'm not a hypocrite. Swank and bunk—those are two things I can't stand in any man or woman. And for real generosity and sincerity, give me the sinner every time."

Lee recognised the ingredient of truth in Ellwood's justifications of their mode of life; but for his part, he could never quite escape the feeling that his own conduct was wrong. He could never achieve Ellwood's buoyancy in dissipation. He sowed his own wild oats in a gloomy, saddened way. Even in the highest revelry, he could not quite shake off his moodiness.

There were few of the girls he had dealings with these days who had any of the personality that distinguished Dolores McGovern. Dolores continued to be a source of wonderment to him. Her mental quality—her perceptive-

ness—was uncommon. She said: "You were," instead of the all-prevalent, "You was," of her class. Her occasional revelations of fineness fairly bowled him over. Even her vulgarity had an honest, sane quality—suggested a certain hardness of spirit.

But it became evident to Lee that she did not propose to waste her youth upon a young man who merely admired her. She had a definite goal in life: she wanted to get married—not to the first man who proposed—but to some "live wire" who could make money for her. She acquiesced in Lee's affectionate demonstrations until it seemed clear he had no intention of marrying her. Then—though she really liked him—she cut him off without a tremor of emotion. "I can't spend any time on triflers," she averred. Lee was shocked at first by her apparent cold-bloodedness, but he soon came to admire more than ever the business-like way in which she set about to lift her life out of the ruck of poverty—the sureness of aim with which she planned to accomplish her life purpose. She used her slim body, her provocative beauty, her sex, as baits; but he did not blame her.

The only other girl who left a lasting impression on him was a pseudo-prostitute named Inga Brandt. Lee encountered her at an assignation house whither he and Ellwood had repaired, quite drunk, an hour or two after midnight. He noticed her because of her silence. She drank her glass of beer slowly, and listened to the others. Her hair was very light, and her broad forehead looked unaccountably serene.

She was a widow, she told him, and had two small children. She worked in a candy store every day from noon until ten at night. But her wages—six dollars a week—barely paid half the family's expenses. So she came down to "No. 203," at the landlady's telephone call, once or twice a week.

She spoke in a matter-of-fact way, and he paid little attention. Such stories were common, and in his experience, were usually maudlin bids for sympathy. But he could not help catching the beauty of her luminous, accusing blue eyes.

Within the week, he came upon her on Woodward avenue. One child toddled at her side, the other she carried in her arms. Her face was placidly happy. Instinctively, Lee dodged past her, lest the sight of him should mar the serenity of her thoughts.

The cruelty of her fate revolted him. Here, nineteen centuries after the birth of Christ, in a community that called itself highly civilised, a woman must still sell her body to feed and clothe her children.

As time went by, the conviction grew in Lee that his excesses were merely in the nature of a drug. It required increasingly large doses to put his unhappiness to sleep. He rarely missed a night downtown with Ellwood. He drank heavily; he came to recognise the uncanny sense of perspective that comes with drunkenness. He had already begun to experience periods of boredom and profound mental despondency. A duller mind than his could not have helped discerning the bleak alliance between poverty and drunkenness and immorality.

He was in such a mood late one night, when Ellwood and he emerged from the familiar brick house with the storm-shed—"No. 203"—and embarked in the taxicab that was to take them home.

Ellwood lay back on the seat limply. The light from street lamps occasionally flitted across his colorless face. The pace was telling, even on him. His skin had a drawn, worn look, and his eyes often appeared puffy. Lee found himself thinking of the tragic futility of the young doctor's life—of the prodigal waste of the natural talent that might have made him a great surgeon.

Ellwood seemed asleep, but all at once he gave a sigh that was almost a groan.

"Oh, God, Lee!" he said with infinite weariness. "I'm so tired of it all!"

X

IT had been quite apparent, at the time of Lee's break with her, that Mrs. Curran had not the slightest intention of withdrawing the influence she had exerted for him at the department store.

With this worry off his mind, Lee took notice of Howard Doman's friendly warning and set to work to remedy the deficiencies in his advertising copy. He was careful not to permit his dissipations with Ellwood James to interfere too seriously with his duties at the store. He was tired a great deal of the time, it is true; he never quite retrieved his earlier spontaneity. But he did work faithfully and with an undeniable mental pleasure in his efforts.

He could not help seeing the big opportunity ahead of him. He was dimly aware of the preliminary skirmishes that were taking place day by day between Doman and Howard Estabrook. There could be no mistaking that Michael Curran was fast failing in health and capability. His retirement was only a matter of months.

The crisis came earlier than he had expected.

"Mike is going to resign at the next directors' meeting," Doman said one day early in May. "Two weeks more will tell the tale."

In some way, the news crept through the store. An atmosphere of suspense pervaded the whole establishment. Few of the clerks liked Estabrook. They had little hope that Doman would do anything for them, but the sentiment was overwhelmingly in his favor.

Lee was more excited than the big advertising manager

himself. He constantly urged Doman on to greater efforts in his own behalf.

"I don't know—Mike's a pretty shrewd chap," Doman would say. "He'll make his decision in his own way."

He had gone to Curran at once and asked him outright for his support, as against Estabrook. "I put it on the straight basis of the store's future development. I didn't knuckle to him a bit, nor ask anything as a personal favor."

Estabrook, on the other hand, was pulling every wire at his disposal. "I don't think Mike likes Estabrook or Pete Curran, or any of their crowd too well," divulged Doman. "Their chief hold on him is the Estabrook baby. The old man's simply crazy about kids, and if I get licked, it'll be that infant's doing."

The day before the directors' meeting, Doman was frowning. "Have you heard their latest stunt?" he demanded. "They're even dragging religion into it. Mrs. Estabrook and Pete Curran have told the old man that I ought not to have the job because my folks were from North Ireland, and the Currans of course are South Irish. Wouldn't that get you?"

The important meeting was to be held at noon; but shortly before eleven, Howard Doman sent for Lee.

"By Golly, I win!" he beamed. "Mike just came in and told me he was going to swing my way."

"There are just three strings attached to my job," he added, with pretended ruefulness. "I had to promise to keep Estabrook and Pete Curran on the payroll for life, and—what do you think?—I'm to give the Estabrook baby a job if I'm still in the saddle when he's grown up. Poor old Mike! I'm afraid he isn't going to last much longer."

Presently, he turned to Lee. "Now, about yourself. I want to be perfectly frank with you. You have the ability to be a cracking good advertising manager. You aren't

doing your best, though. Too much night life, maybe. But I'm going to give you the job temporarily. It's up to you, Lee."

The new organisation went into effect June first. Michael Curran retained office as president and kept an advisory control over the finances of the store. Howard Doman's new title, at his own suggestion, was merchandise manager. His authority was absolute in all departments, but his special care was the supervision of the buying and selling. Directly under him worked the buyers of all departments. Under his general control, also, were Estabrook, as store superintendent, and Lee, as advertising manager. Doman promptly combined all of the bookkeeping activities into a separate department, created the office of records manager, and promoted the former chief credit man to the new place.

Before fall, he had set in motion most of the reforms he had been preaching. His first important move was the leasing of a new store with twice as much floor space, a block further north on Woodward avenue. This alone effected an immediate improvement. The new store had broad aisles, and, for the most part, glass show-cases. The old crowding, the former messiness of the merchandise, automatically disappeared. The salespeople had more room; the air they breathed was immeasurably better. Doman installed a pneumatic tube system that converged at the cashier's office, and then emancipated most of the undersized cash-boys and girls. The few wrapping-girls that remained were all over sixteen.

Even more important, Doman struck at the root of the spirit of discontent that stifled the store's growth. One by one, he weeded out the Curran relatives and friends who held soft jobs. He even deposed Estabrook and Peter Curran from their high offices and created sinecures so that they might still draw their salaries, yet do no harm to the store organisation. All these vacancies, Doman filled strictly on

the principle of merit—not long service alone, but general ability. More than that, he let it be noised abroad that henceforth all salaries would be adjusted largely on the basis of the amount of sales. Other things being equal, a salesman would receive about three per cent. of his total average sales. This plan raised the salaries of the more competent salesmen, and ejected the incurable malcontents.

Doman's whole aim was to dissipate the demoralising bacillus of "pull" from the atmosphere of the great store, to make each employé feel that he was on a clean, self-respecting basis—that his interests and the store's were identical. Doman wanted a salesman to talk about "our" goods, "our" policy. He himself remained approachable and scrupulously considerate, and he insisted on perfect courtesy to each customer that entered the store.

Little by little, the idea gained ground that at last a new régime had come into being, that the new boss wasn't "kidding" them, that real ability would certainly achieve its reward. It was a difficult thing for the employés to believe, but there seemed no escape from the actual facts.

XI

SLOWLY the conclusion was being forced on Lee that his present philosophy of life was utterly unsatisfying. And, according to Howard Doman, he must either change his habits or fail to make good in his new position.

The spectacle of Michael Curran took on especial significance for him these days. The old Irishman still visited the offices regularly. He looked very ill; there was something pathetic in his restlessness. Lee recalled Doman's diagnosis of Curran's life-motives: "Money and women." But now the fun of making money was a thing of the past; and according to Dolores McGovern, he was "too old for women." He no longer had any interests in life.

Lee wondered if at sixty, he would be the same pitiful victim of his physical cravings. The old age of a hedonist was not exactly an inspiring picture.

Shortly after his new appointment, he received a telephone call from a woman whose voice he could not identify.

The woman seemed either timid or stubborn about giving her name.

Then—"It's Vera."

"What!" he exclaimed unbelievably. "Not Vera Wakefield!"

Her laugh was unmistakable. "Yes, that is, Vera Higginson."

Still it seemed incredible.

"Well," he pursued, "can't I see you?"

She gave him an address in a rooming house district, and he made an engagement for that evening.

During the rest of the day, the prospect of seeing her

monopolised his mind. Vera Wakefield! The name unloosed a freshet of memories. He had not seen her for four years. Recollections of his anguish over her infidelity throbbed in his brain.

Then for the first time he thought about Vera's husband. Was he in the city? He had not even remembered to ask. Or was she in the city alone? Perhaps her husband didn't know. Straightway his mind veered off to the glamorous possibility of a new intrigue.

Lee now owned an automobile of his own—a trim little Durham runabout. Shortly after eight o'clock that night, he drove up to the address Vera had given him.

A moth-eaten man in shirt sleeves answered the door-bell.

"Mrs. Higginson!" he called up the narrow staircase.

Presently Vera appeared at the head of the stairs. His first impression of her in the flickering gas-light was that she had not changed in the slightest detail during the years that had elapsed. She was the same soft-eyed, irresistibly appealing girl to whom he had once plighted everlasting devotion.

They shook hands and stood looking at each other a moment.

"I have my car outside," recollected Lee, with a faint consciousness of pride. He was rather anxious to show her how successful he had been.

It was not until they were seated on opposite sides of a café table in the hostile glare of a hundred ceiling lights, that it came home to him with a painful shock that Vera had changed after all. She had lost the virginal slenderness of youth. She was not exactly buxom, but she had "filled out." Gone irrevocably was the girl he had worshipped on Mount Phillis.

Vera likewise was regarding him searchingly.

"Why, Lee," she said, "you're stouter—a whole lot stouter!"

After that, he found it difficult to keep the thrill of the situation intact, to imagine into the mature woman opposite him the warm, elusive Vera he had been dreaming of all day.

They sat there for a space, finding themselves strangely inarticulate. His lavish proffers of food and drink seemed to fall short of their mark.

"Can't we ride some more?" Vera asked. "There's so much noise in here."

It was as if they both welcomed the illusions of the darkness outside.

"By the way, Vera," he bethought himself to ask, after a time, "you haven't told me about yourself—how you happen to be here."

Vera waited a moment before she answered. "I thought you might guess," she said.

They crossed the bridge to Belle Isle, and at length he brought the runabout to a stop at the head of the island. The river was alive with the red and green lights of motor-boats. Up in Lake St. Clair, they caught the flashing signals of lighthouses. Occasionally the phantom of a sail-boat crept across the path of the moonlight. Somehow the water seemed very black.

Vera's story began to unfold. She had come to Detroit because she felt she could not endure living with her husband another day.

Her family were urging her to marry Milo Higginson, she said, even before Lee left Chatham. Her mother was sure Lee was not "practical"—would never be a money-maker.

"And, you know—I'm sort of surprised myself at the way you've succeeded," she added naïvely. "I really felt just as mother did—that you'd never make money. Many a time I've gone over that last talk of ours on Mount Phillis. When you said you believed in ideals and that

success always came to the man who deserved it—to tell the honest truth, I doubted it. I thought you were really too high-minded to succeed.” She turned to him radiantly. “But you *have* made good—and stayed fine, too. It’s just splendid.”

Lee was silent.

“Oh, I know you think I was weak to give in to them,” Vera began again. “But you have no idea what pressure your own family can bring to bear on you. Then month after month went by—and you didn’t come back. They finally just plain cowed me into it, I guess. The night before my wedding—well, I cried till morning.”

Her face was tragic in the reflected moonlight. “Oh, Lee, why did you pay any attention to my letter? Why didn’t you come and run off with me?”

“How could I know?” he answered impatiently. Over him slowly crept the despairing realisation that a greater courage than his—a willingness to fight for her—might have saved Vera for himself. In the supreme crisis he had failed her.

“You couldn’t know,” she reflected. “I don’t mean I think you were at all to blame. You were always too good to me—that was the only trouble with you. Yes, I mean it—too good to me.”

Her married life had been like a prison to her from the very beginning. She had kept on loving Lee, and one day her cloddish husband had found her reading some of Lee’s Detroit letters.

“If he’d dragged me ’round by the hair, I might have stood it. But he’d only laugh—and then get sullen. He’s just plain animal, Lee.”

She had repeatedly suggested a divorce, but Higginson wouldn’t have it so. “He said he’d got me, and he was going to prevent you from ever having me, anyway.”

Intimacy with a man she hated finally became unbearable, and she had come to Detroit.

"I've been here a month already," she astonished Lee by saying. "And what do you think I'm doing for a living?"

He confessed his complete bewilderment.

"Playing the piano in a movie!" She really laughed, for the first time. "Not much of a job—I make just about enough to pay my way. But it'll do for a beginning, and anything's better than—than that!" She gave a significant gesture, then looked up at him earnestly. "You don't believe one bad mistake ought to do for a person, do you?"

Lee returned a somewhat preoccupied negative. He was not finding Vera's mood at all provocative.

"I don't either," she went on decisively. "One night, two or three months ago, I suddenly made up my mind to clear out—forget all my miserable mistakes—and somehow make a fresh start. Even if I starved for it. I simply won't admit that my whole life's spoiled. There must be some way out."

"How about your father and mother?" he interposed.

"Cut loose from them—from everybody and everything."

They sat in silence looking at the lights on the water. At last they turned toward each other. Vera yielded to him eagerly.

As they half-reclined in the automobile, holding each other close, a sense of tragic futility came over Lee. He remembered their last hour on Mount Phillis. But now all the ecstasy, all the wonder of their former love had somehow stolen away.

And as he kept on, making the only kind of love he was capable of these days, Vera abruptly laughed—a sad laugh of self-derision.

"You're like all the rest, Lee," she said in tones of infinite disillusion, and fairly pushed him away. "You never

would have acted like this, in the old days. You're different, too."

They drove back to Vera's cheerless rooming house in profound depression.

"I can only say I'm sorry," he said. "I guess we're both pretty unhappy people nowadays."

"Let's forget to-night," urged Vera. "Let's just remember things as they used to be. I'm sorry I said what I did to you, because really I have implicit faith in you. Never forget that, Lee: I have implicit faith in you. I can't help it somehow."

It was not so much the realisation of his brutality to her that overwhelmed him with despair as he left her—though that realisation was bad enough. Vera's life had been a dismal tragedy. Fate had cut and bruised her cruelly. True, she had changed. She was more mature, less alluringly youthful. But they had loved each other deeply, purely. She had come to him, believing in him, idealising him, needing his help terribly; and he might better have struck her in the face.

More intolerable still, though, was his deep conviction of the irreparable loss of something fine within himself. He had clasped Vera in his arms, and found himself clutching a body—any woman's body. Love inevitably meant bodies to him nowadays. It was no longer a spiritual thing. He had dragged it through the mire, and it had become befouled—a gross and hideous thing.

PART THREE

I

THERE ensued a brief period during which Lee Hillquit merely went through the motions of living.

Whenever he permitted himself to think at all, he came to a dead stop almost at once. The events of his four years in Detroit seemed wholly upsetting. He could not recall one of his youthful assumptions about life that had stood the test of actual experience. Everything was topsyturvy. To idealise was sheer folly: that had been his first painful discovery. He had been mistaken about success, too. As long as he relied on mere hard work, on his own merit, he had tasted bitter failure; then all at once, by the grace of sheer luck, success had fallen from the skies. If he had chosen a slightly different route for his melancholy walk three years ago last April—if he had not turned that particular corner off Cass avenue—Mrs. Curran's limousine would never have opened its doors for him and swiftly carried him off to fortune. He would be receiving ten dollars a week as teller in a Chatham bank, instead of six thousand a year as advertising manager of the great city department store of Curran & Company. Life was wholly haphazard. The wisest seer could not predict what to-morrow would bring forth. What did it avail a man to labor and plan when Fate might be just around the corner waiting to undo the efforts of a lifetime, like a ruthless boy stepping on an ant-hill? It was better to trust to luck.

'No, idealism was far beside the mark; yet, when one

swung to the opposite extreme and made gods out of one's senses, life became even more desolate. Hedonism tricked one with tinsel that turned to dross in one's hands, left one's soul utterly arid and forlorn.

He had essayed both virtue and wickedness, and neither brought him happiness.

It was while he was in this quandary that a stray remark of Fred Badger's lodged itself in his mind.

Fred and he had been seeing a great deal of each other ever since their reconciliation three years before. Fred's success seemed to continue undiminished, and Lee always felt his own achievements completely outdone.

Fred had gone out of his way to show favors. He had introduced Lee everywhere; he had insisted that Lee act as usher at his fashionable church wedding; and since his marriage, he had made a point of inviting his class-mate to his expensive apartment for dinner, at least once a month.

The remark that struck home to Lee occurred during one of these dinners. There were only four of them there: Fred and Helene, his wife, Lee and—to fill a last minute vacancy—Eleanor Badger.

They were talking about a multi-millionaire automobile manufacturer who had just announced an unprecedented increase of wages at his plant.

"He says he's doing it just as a matter of social justice—whatever that means," Helene Badger set forth.

Fred laughed scornfully. "That's good! Why, his only motive is to get free advertising. 'Social justice!' That's all bosh!"

Eleanor cut in sharply. "You always refuse to believe in anything but selfish motives."

"Well, why should I kid myself, the way you do?" demanded Fred. "This fellow's after money—just like all the rest of us. I don't blame him a particle."

The subject seemed to fascinate him.

"Yes, money," he repeated. "People may fool themselves about ideals and such things. But it never gets them anywhere."

His voice rose. "No, sir, people don't ask about a man's ideals. All they want to know is—how much money has he? They don't even inquire how he got it, so long as he has it. And they're right. Money is the one thing in life you can be sure of; and if you have money, you can get anything else you want—power, position, even beauty. It never disappoints you. It's the one sure bet."

This appealed to Lee as the most sensible viewpoint he had encountered for a long time. A year or two ago, he would have thought it crude, sordid. But now it rang true.

He was almost as contemptuous as the others toward Eleanor when she continued to disagree with Fred.

"All money can do is buy *things*," she insisted, "and *things*, by themselves, never made anybody happy for long. How many rich people do you know who are happy?"

It was rank foolishness. What was the matter with this girl, anyway? Lee had seen her only once or twice since his first disagreeable experience with her at the Rutgers' house. He had gathered from Fred's chance statements that she was something of a disappointment to her family. She had made a promising début, and during her first year out she had been extremely popular. "She had a chance to marry Burritt Johnson," Fred complained. Burritt Johnson, he went on to explain, was a much sought-after Chicago millionaire. "But she had some finicky idea that she didn't love him enough, and I'll be hanged if she didn't turn him down cold!"

Fred's family resented her "finicky ideas," and in return, Eleanor became sarcastic. She seemed to delight in saying nasty things to people, and naturally, her popularity speedily dropped to nothing at all.

It was obvious that she was a perplexing problem to Fred.

"She might have been a great help to all of us," he moaned. "Instead of that, she's a handicap."

That same night, as Lee drove her home, she revealed a new phase of herself.

"I suppose you dislike me as much as everybody else," she said abruptly.

Lee had an instinct to have things out with her then and there.

"Well, no, I can't say I dislike you," he answered. "But I do think you go out of your way to say a good many disagreeable things."

She regarded him moodily. "I suppose I do—and it doesn't do any one any good, myself least of all. You see, I've been forced to lead a life I simply detest, and that's made me rather unhappy."

Lee remained unmoved. "It seems to me you've had a very fortunate kind of life. You have social position——"

"Social position!" she broke in with withering scorn. "Can't you see the fraud of all this so-called 'Society'? I think it's hopelessly inane, yet I'm supposed to do the same old conventional things. Dress and flirt, flirt and dress—till I catch a man. It's an intelligent life for a human being, isn't it? Don't you see how it smothers some of us? But as for me—I'm through with it. I'm going to be a person—I'm going to do things—I'm going to use my brains, to express myself somehow—no matter what my mother and Fred and all the rest say!"

Lee did not find her ideas congenial. "What do you intend doing?" he asked.

She smiled almost happily. "You sound as though you believed that good old adage: 'a woman's place is in the home.' But you're due for a real surprise in the next few years. I'm not the only girl that's bored to tears with doing nothing—except fascinating men. There are a whole army of us already. We want to be people, not pets. What

am I going to do? I don't know exactly, but I'm going to accomplish something—or try to, anyway. Everybody has the right to some form of self-expression—even females. Honestly, I'd rather be a successful professional woman than anything else in the world.”

It all sounded somewhat hysterical to Lee—perhaps pathological. He was secretly supercilious. But he did sense her unhappiness—her stifled quality; and straightway he lost his feeling of irritation.

“I'm afraid I've been ranting,” she said as they reached her home. “But I couldn't help it. It isn't often I take the trouble to explain myself.”

Lee shook hands with her. “Good luck to you, anyway!” he said.

But it was significant that as soon as he left her, his mind promptly leaped back over her words to what Fred had said about money.

II

IT was pure coincidence that at the very time Lee came under the influence of Fred Badger's simple recipe for happiness, his own personal fortunes began to rise by leaps and bounds.

In the autumn of the year 1911—when Fred made his portentous remarks about the omnipotency of money—Lee could hardly be said to have made much financial progress. Three years had elapsed since his investments in Broadway real estate and Durham motor stock; and his head was by no means above water even now. He had paid for his five thousand dollars worth of stock in the automobile concern, but most of this stock was hypothecated at the bank for the loan of sufficient money to assist him in keeping up the payments on his Broadway lot. On this lot, he had managed to pay but four thousand dollars in addition to his first three thousand.

Whenever he gave the situation much thought, it seemed to him that he ought to be much farther ahead. During the three last years, he had drawn twelve thousand dollars in salary at the Curran store; his mother's insurance and the sale of the Chatham house had brought him six thousand: a total of eighteen thousand dollars. His investments amounted to about nine thousand dollars net. In other words, he had spent nine thousand dollars—three-fourths of his salary—for his personal living expenses and his dissipations with Elwood James.

There was even a mortgage on his Durham runabout.

Lee's dissatisfaction with himself extended to his investments. He had paid little attention either to his real estate

or his automobile stock. The Durham Company had paid a one hundred per cent. stock dividend, but that meant nothing to Lee. He would have preferred a ten per cent. cash dividend. The future payments on his Broadway frontage worried him. He figured that he could negotiate a fifteen thousand dollar mortgage, if necessary, but even at that, he remained under obligation to pay more than eight thousand dollars within the next two years or lose the property.

To tell the truth, neither investment appeared at all promising to him. He often permitted himself irritated thoughts about Mrs. Curran's poor judgment in urging him to invest his money as he had. Nor did Fred Badger's incessant suggestions alleviate his frame of mind. Fred was forever disparaging Lee's investments, and proposing attractive deals in stocks and bonds. "Automobile companies are just gambles," he insisted, "and real estate in Detroit isn't even a gamble. Most of the people I know dropped all they had in the panic of 1893."

Indeed, if Lee could have disposed of his holdings without any considerable sacrifice, he would doubtless have done so, and placed the proceeds at Fred's disposal.

But even before the end of 1911, a decided change became perceptible.

Lee found a young stock broker waiting for him one afternoon shortly before Christmas.

"What do you hold your Durham stock at, Mr. Hillquit?" he asked.

Lee eyed his visitor in perplexed surprise. "I don't know," he finally said. "What will you offer me?"

"You hold one hundred shares," said the broker. "We will pay you two hundred a share, minus our commission."

The import of the figures sank slowly into Lee's consciousness. Then he really stared. They were offering

him twenty thousand dollars for his five thousand dollar investment.

"I haven't paid much attention to my Durham stock," he said easily. "What's the cause of this sudden activity?"

The youthful broker showed a disposition to candor. "Rumors of a dividend," he diagnosed. "It's a question whether or not it's advisable to sell. There may be a whopping big dividend, and again there may be none at all. But you know how much the Ford Company's paying. That's what's gotten people excited about motor stocks."

Lee reserved decision. When the stock salesman had gone, he telephoned the treasurer of the Durham Company, with whom he had a slight acquaintance.

"What would you advise me to do?" he asked.

The treasurer seemed somewhat hesitant. "Of course, the matter of a dividend is up to the board of directors. We've been making money out here, but they may decide to stick it all back into the business." He paused. "Everything considered, you'd better hang on."

Lee's inclination had been to sell the stock, but he finally took the treasurer's advice.

The second week in January, 1912, he glanced negligently at the financial page of his morning paper.

"DURHAM DECLARES 100% DIVIDEND."

Lee gave a scarcely perceptible start and re-read the headline. The article beneath stated tersely that the directors, at their annual meeting held the day before, had not only declared this astonishing dividend, but, in addition, had put a large sum back into the business.

"This prosperous member of the motors group has had a phenomenal year," the article continued. "Contracts have already been let for its new factory on the belt line at Kingston street, and officials predict a banner growth for

the concern. Production for 1912 is estimated at twenty thousand cars."

The whole thing seemed unreal. Even the check for ten thousand dollars that arrived a few days later could not quite put the breath of actuality into the miracle.

Yet this was but the first of a series of similar happenings.

Hardly had the month passed when a real estate man offered Lee forty thousand dollars for his Broadway lot. [Two weeks later, the same dealer suggested fifty thousand.

Then Lee came slowly to realise what was beginning to transpire all about him.

He had been aware in a sleepy sort of way that Detroit had grown during his four years' residence. The crowds on the downtown sidewalks had become thicker. There were ten times as many automobiles on the streets. Business had increased fifty per cent. at the Curran store.

He had lived in the midst of these facts, yet he had hardly sensed their significance. He had been so preoccupied with his own round of life that he had not once paused to lift his head and catch the cadence of things about him. He had heard vague stories about the city's growth and its future possibilities, but he was naturally of a conservative, even pessimistic frame of mind, and he discounted most of these tales.

But now he sought to attune his ear more sensitively to the march of events. Automobiles and real estate—they were the magic symbols! Automobiles were a necessity; the market for them had hardly been touched; Detroit was the centre of the big new industry, and it must inevitably grow as the business grew. That meant a bigger city—and a boom in real estate.

His stimulated imagination discerned the spirit of expansion, of prosperity, in the very air. He began to wonder why everybody could not catch the vision. Most of the people still came and went, without the faintest intimation

of the incredible opportunities that invited them from every side.

A great many timorous souls, indeed, seemed to believe that the boom was just ending, instead of beginning. They spoke with reluctance of the opportunities they had missed.

"Henry Ford came to me and begged me to put in a thousand dollars. Yes, I know him well."

"That property on Adams avenue just sold for fifty thousand dollars. I could have bought it ten years ago for five thousand."

Lee heard such complaints everywhere. The could-have-put-money-in-the-Ford-Company individuals waxed as prevalent as Mayflower ancestors.

But the optimists who believed that the city's prosperity had hardly started were still few.

Lee decided to hold his Broadway property for a still higher price—in fact, he used his ten thousand dollar dividend as a first payment on the fifty feet next to his lot.

That same spring, he refused an offer of fifty thousand dollars for his Durham Motor holdings.

III

IN the wake of his new and astounding prosperity, certain effects inevitably followed.

He suddenly became very much sought after socially, for example.

For the last two years, his appearance in "Society" had been sporadic. Through Fred Badger, he continued to meet habitual occupants of the "Social Column." But all the currents of his existence had seemed adverse to his becoming a "Society man." First, there had been Mrs. Curran; the shame of that situation had taken away some of his self-confidence. Then his life with Ellwood had absorbed all his energies. He found that unlike many of his acquaintances, he was not morally facile enough to frequent assignation houses and exclusive drawing rooms simultaneously.

But strangely enough, he who had by now lost his faith in everything except money, still retained somewhat the illusion about "Society." True, the words "Four Hundred" no longer produced quite the same thrill of humility in him. Ellwood James' fierce tirades against "swank," and Eleanor's occasional outbursts on the subject of social hypocrisy could not fail to have opened his eyes a little. He saw through the cracks. Yet he still cherished most of his old awe, still genuflected reverently before the mystic shrine of what he called Aristocracy.

Fred's friends had been conventionally polite to him. He knew he was regarded as an unusually successful young business man, but he detected a certain undercurrent of levity in people's attitudes, as if they were saying: "You

don't fool us for a minute. We know how you bought success." He realised, too, that he was a man of no "family." He hadn't the faintest notion about his ancestors. It had never seemed to matter heretofore. And nearly every girl he met wanted to know what fraternity he had belonged to at the University.

He noticed another peculiar social phenomenon. Whenever he appeared in public with Fred and his wife, or under some equally distinguished patronage, nearly everybody seemed to speak to him. But let him appear at the theatre alone or in company with some socially obscure person, and not one of his *élite* acquaintances could seem to remember him. Not that they were crude enough to cut him outright. But in some odd way, their eyes failed to meet his.

All in all, Lee had been made very much aware of his social deficiencies.

But now, with the same suddenness as his new affluence, social popularity descended upon his astonished head. Prominent women, who had seemed doubtful about knowing him, nodded clear across the theatre at him, no matter who his companion. He figured at a few very exclusive dinners that spring; and in the fall, he knew every *débütante* a month before the season opened. It came to his ears that he was at last on the exclusive list maintained by the leading social *entrepreneur* of the city.

He had always felt a little awkward, a little diffident about expressing his opinions. But now his every remark was received with a deference subtly flattering. It was evident that his word bore weight. "I heard you said such-and-such to So-and-so": phrases like this greeted him everywhere he went.

Nowhere was this strange change in his social fortunes more noticeable than with Fred and Helene Badger. Fred had been his social sponsor from the start; yet Lee had

never discerned any glow of pride in Fred's demeanor. As for Helene, it had been only too evident at times that she chafed at her husband's patronage of Lee.

She was an avowed advocate of keeping social lines distinct.

"One has to be so careful whom one meets," Lee heard her say on one occasion. "Once you've been introduced to undesirable people, there's almost no getting rid of them."

Enforced association with inferiors caused her acute discomfort. The most trying events in her life were the annual visits of Fred's wealthy old aunt, Miss Jane Badger. Miss Badger lived on a farm one hundred miles from the city. She was a shrewd old lady, and Lee rather liked her genuineness. But she dressed eccentrically, and she had protruding front teeth. Her table manners were rather irritating, too. She had an unfortunate habit of opening her mouth when she chewed, and she was not to be deprived of the solid enjoyment of a post-prandial tooth-pick.

During such visits Lee could see that Helene was slowly perishing of mortification. Yet she did not dare offend the old lady. Miss Badger was rich, and Fred and Eleanor were the only relatives she liked. Besides, she was quite feeble, and could not possibly live much longer.

So Helene must smile upon the unwelcome visitor even though she was inwardly frozen with indignation. It made an amusing picture.

But now Fred's wife, too, beamed on Lee. The personnel of her dinner parties improved. Instead of social negligibles, she began producing marriageable young women. Her particular boon-companion she contrived to throw in Lee's company so frequently that their engagement was rumored.

Lee was no more than human. He was as susceptible to flattery—even obvious flattery—as the next man. He could not help feeling enormously more important than before.

On every side, charming people took his every pronouncement as well-nigh infallible.

The only thing that saved him from following the lines of least resistance and entering into some convenient marriage was the circumstance that all this homage was so grossly overdone. It was positively banal. He became blasé in the nick of time. His sense of humor at the battle of the dowagers over him intervened providentially.

His narrowest escape really was with Renée Reynolds. She was the one girl among the fashionables with whom he had kept up some semblance of friendship from the beginning. She had been "nice" to him—that is, she had let him call frequently and take her to the theatre. He even prided himself that she numbered him among the list of remotely eligible suitors. Still, he was aware of being but one among many. Renée required numbers of attentive men; an evening alone at home she counted a failure.

Now, however, Lee was promptly taken into the inner circle. She assumed a softer attitude with him. In a score of unanalysable ways, she made him see that she had come to care for him. Her mother urged him to come frequently for dinner; her father told him pseudo-humorous stories.

At this juncture, Lee came to perceive that there were "sets within sets." Helene Badger took occasion to convey to him that Renée didn't really "belong." She was "in Society," but not a member of the inmost group.

Lee's impressions were just plastic enough at this stage to take the warning seriously. He became critical of Renée; she no longer dazzled him. He began to resent the vague intimations of proprietorship which up to now had been subtly gratifying to him.

The next time he called on Renée he kept his eyes open. Cold-bloodedly, he noted the appeal of her décolleté gown, her neck and arms; the artificial brightness of her color;

the way she looked at him. He even distinguished the faintly sensuous redolence of sachet powder.

Many a time he had been tempted to take her in his arms; and now he perceived that this was precisely the emotion that Renée's whole appearance was calculated to beget in men.

He knew if he yielded to this temptation, he would be inescapably enmeshed in silken nets. He could almost hear her first prompt question: "What makes you want to kiss me?"—and his own somehow-forced response.

The bait of sex! Vague reminiscences stirred in him.

But what was this Renée was saying?

"The man I marry must be able to make a lot of money."

She said it with a kind of charming daring. Somehow it was obviously a tribute to his own abilities.

All at once he remembered.

Dolores McGovern!

Renée Reynolds had used almost the same words as the self-reliant little fur-sales-girl. She employed almost the same sex-appeal. The only differences between them were all in Dolores' favor. She was indisputably better looking than Renée, and she earned her own living. She performed a definite economic service to the world; whereas Renée's only apparent function in life was to be an alluring parasite.

That episode marked another turning point in Lee's social progress. He began to see sham everywhere. It dawned on him as just possible that his sudden prosperity might have had something to do with his social triumphs. Evidently, a single man with money could get anywhere he wanted. He came to regard his new friendships with distrust: the girls who wanted him for his money; the sleek-looking "Society men"—many of them cock-sure little persons, living, Lee knew, on allowances from their wives or mothers—who spoke about "comfort" as if it were the high-

est quest of any man, and who besieged Lee for "tips" about motor stocks and real estate. Many of them—men and women both—were charming, many of them amusing; they all had their flashes of sincerity: but, one and all, they failed of *reality*. They were not vital. "Public Futilities," Ellwood James called them. Lee sometimes felt that what they most lacked, by way of saving grace, was a touch of vulgarity.

Yet these people, by their profound conviction of their own superiority, somehow persuaded the rest of mankind—most of it, anyway—that they were in very surety a higher race of beings; that being "in Society" mysteriously endowed men and women with virtues of a higher order; that a "Society man" or a "Society woman" was indefinitely different and better than other human beings. It was a splendid example, Lee reflected, of the power of sheer self-conceit. Thus, outsiders continued to look longingly up at "Society's" sacred precincts, and newly rich women kept up the determined struggle to batter their way somehow through its thick walls,

IV

THERE seemed no stopping Lee's phenomenal financial rise. It began to be said of him, as it had been of P. H. Taladay, that everything he touched turned to gold.

His operations remained comparatively simple. He still retained his Durham Motor Company holdings, which by dint of stock dividends, had increased to a par value of fifty thousand dollars. Lee's dividends in the years 1912 and 1913 amounted to forty-five thousand dollars. He valued his stock at more than one hundred thousand.

In the spring of 1913, he sold his Broadway lots for one hundred and sixty thousand dollars—just twice what he had paid for them. This sum, together with a part of his Durham dividends, he at once re-invested in Woodward avenue frontage, a few blocks above Grand Circus Park.

Roughly speaking, he was now worth at least three hundred thousand dollars.

At this time, he resigned his position as advertising manager of Curran & Co.

He had been contemplating the move for nearly a year. His outside interests did not require very much of his time, but he found his work at the store increasingly confining. When one has become accustomed to thinking in terms of tens—yes, hundreds—of thousands of dollars, it seems irksome to spend one's energies describing the alluring qualities of women's waists and children's underwear. Even his salary—now seven thousand five hundred dollars—appeared petty.

All in all, Lee could not escape the conviction that he was destined for bigger things.

Howard Doman received his decision with his characteristic expression of captivated gravity.

"I don't suppose an increase of salary would tempt you," he reconnoitred. "I'd planned to raise you gradually to ten thousand a year. The job isn't really worth any more than that."

"It isn't a question of money," confirmed Lee.

"I see," answered Doman. "Well, what are you going to do with yourself, anyway?"

Lee admitted that his plans were vague. "My investments will take quite a good deal of time."

"Investments!" exclaimed the rotund merchandise manager. "Investments are all very well as a side issue, but a man of your calibre wants some work to put his heart and brains into." He paused abruptly, and clapped Lee on the shoulder half-apologetically. "There, there! I didn't mean to climb into the pulpit. If you've made up your mind to leave us, there'll be no keeping you, I suspect. But I'm sorry to see you go. You have advertising brains, and besides, I'll miss you."

Doman no longer assumed his former heroic proportions in his assistant's mind; yet Lee had never lost his wholehearted respect and liking for the big man. Doman had been his loyal friend from the beginning.

They said good-bye a little sadly. Lee remarked anew the startling contradiction between Doman's impassive, flabby face and his alive, ever-questioning eyes.

"Come up once in a while and see how we're getting along," said the merchandise manager.

Lee left the elevator at the mezzanine balcony and stood for a few moments looking out over the busy main floor—just as he had been in the habit of doing in the old building.

There was no doubting the tremendous organic change that Doman had wrought in the big store. It was not only the more obvious improvements: the broader aisles, the

neater displays, the better light and air. It was something that Lee felt, rather than saw—a new spirit, a new atmosphere. Doman had achieved the miracle of transforming the army of disgruntled, discouraged employés into a force of eager, courteous helpers. The old “knocking” had disappeared forever. Curran salaries were fifty per cent. higher than in any other department store in Detroit—but that was not all. Every salesman in the establishment knew he was getting a square deal. His pay depended on his sales. If he deserved promotion, he was sure to get it eventually. He no longer had to toady or pull wires.

Doman had even introduced a system of limited profit-sharing. The preceding Christmas he had distributed a total of more than one hundred thousand dollars, in the form of bonuses, to his employés. He paid salaries to salesmen even when they were on sick-leave, and he employed competent doctors and nurses to attend them.

The most surprising feature of Doman's reforms was that the Curran store was making more money than ever before. Gross sales were forty per cent. higher, and the stockholders received twenty per cent. dividends, instead of eighteen.

V

BY the spring of 1914, when he became thirty years old, Lee Hillquit was worth half a million dollars. People said he was a millionaire; and indeed, his available capital, increased by bank loans, did not far lag behind seven figures.

He lived luxuriously in an Indian Village house which he had bought the preceding fall, and already he was looking around for an adequate country estate. He owned a limousine and a six-cylinder touring car. Six perfectly fitting suits, a dozen pair of shoes, a half-hundred fresh cravats awaited his critical choice each morning. He belonged to three city clubs and two country clubs; and he played golf three afternoons a week.

He had been elected a director in one of the three strongest Detroit banks. One of his fellow-directors, by an odd chance, was P. H. Taladay, with whom he was now on very friendly terms. He contributed to the Republican party's campaign fund, and it was rumored that he had influence with the city administration.

All Detroit knew him and the story of his remarkable rise to power. He found himself in demand as a speaker in the public schools and before various young people's organisations. His topic was usually: "How to Succeed"; and his unvarying recipes to the younger generation were Hard Work and the Virtuous Life.

Small wonder that Lee's ideas about himself had undergone considerable change.

In the beginning, his new prosperity had taken the semblance of a mirage. When he thought of his abject poverty

of a few years ago, the new order of things was simply incredible. He had no illusions about himself at first. He had achieved his start because an older woman conceived a hardly laudable passion for him. The rest had been pure luck. He himself would never have thought of investing in real estate or Durham Motors. That was Mrs. Curran's doing, too. He hadn't turned a hand. He knew practically nothing about the Durham factory. He was not responsible in the remotest way for Detroit's growth and its consequent real estate boom. He had produced only a negligible fraction of his wealth by his own efforts. It was sheer accident that he was a rich man.

But as time went by, Lee began to ascribe higher virtues to himself. The whole city was calling him a Captain of Finance. Perhaps people were right. It was almost inevitable that he should gradually come to think of himself as a man of rare judgment, of uncanny intuition, in all that pertained to investments.

It was inevitable, also, that he should instinctively begin casting about for some adequate opportunity of exercising his newly appreciated abilities. His withdrawal from the Curran store left him with more leisure than he wanted. He discovered that he was becoming restless.

Early one morning in May, 1914, Fred Badger telephoned Lee at his house.

"Can you take lunch with Will Eaton and me this noon?" Fred interrogated. "We're working on a new deal I think you might be interested in."

Lee acquiesced, without any great animation. Fred was always suggesting "deals," but Lee found few of them attractive. He had invested a few thousand dollars in Fred's schemes, and on the whole he had lost money. He had never quite succeeded in getting over his first awe of Fred; yet by now he did entertain some slight misgivings as to his friend's infallibility as a financial expert.

They met that noon at a downtown club. Will Eaton proved to be a stranger of about Lee's own age. His home was in Boston, he explained; but he had been associated with a Cleveland automobile factory until recently. He was of medium stature, pale and chastely ascetic of countenance, aristocratic of feature, and slightly disapproving of demeanor. His eye-glasses added to his look of austere aloofness, and his thin lips curved down judicially at the corners. He spoke in measured fashion, as if weighing his words—with an accent that seemed authentically Bostonese.

"He comes from one of the best families in Massachusetts," confided Fred at an opportune moment. "He has splendid letters of introduction."

But Mr. Eaton, of Boston, was something more than the scion of a splendid Massachusetts family, it soon developed. He admitted at once that he had few peers as an automobile engineer. He had just completed his sixth year in the business, and he pined for larger fields.

"There was no future for me in Cleveland," he told them. "The people I was associated with have a conservative, old-fashioned design, and no power under Heaven could open their eyes to anything new. That's why I severed connections with them."

What he wanted, Mr. Eaton explained over his demitasse, was to find out whether or not Detroit was enough of a "live" town to finance a new automobile company.

"Of course, if this city can't do it, I'll go back East," he said with an eloquent shrug of his shoulders. "I have assurances from Boston capitalists that they will back me. But I feel that Detroit is the hub of the industry, and as such, deserves first consideration."

"I told Will that Lee Hillquit was the man to swing the deal, if any one could," put in Fred Badger.

Eaton's frosty eye surveyed Lee with what purported to be admiration.

"Yes," he echoed, "I heard a great deal of you down in Cleveland."

He expatiated fluently. The design for the new car was quite novel. He had been planning it for the last two years. The estimated price was twelve hundred dollars.

He produced a few blue prints.

"Just look at the lines of it!" he exclaimed with undisguised pride. "It is at least two years ahead of any car made in America, and I venture to say you'll find nothing prettier even in France."

"Very snappy," commented Lee. To tell the truth, the design did not impress him as especially original; but he bowed to more expert knowledge.

"Six cylinder, high-speed motor," continued Eaton. "That's an innovation in a low-priced car. Self-starter and everything else that the more expensive cars have."

So far as the design went, he explained, the car was an assured success. The only requirements that remained were a first-class organisation and enough capital to keep things going for six months.

"How much money will you need?" asked Lee. The proposition interested him keenly.

The man from Boston drew from his pocket a notebook filled with figures.

"Frankly, I see no necessity of beginning in a small way," he argued. "I know enough of factory organisation to avoid the usual mistakes. Therefore, I propose to start on a reasonably large scale. I should like to begin manufacturing before fall, and I want an output of at least ten thousand cars the first year."

He consulted his figures. "We should have at least five hundred thousand dollars available capital," he estimated. "Suppose our capital stock is three hundred thousand; we ought to be able to secure most of the balance from the local banks."

He went into greater detail: so much for parts, so much for advertising, for labor, for overhead expense. Lee listened with an expression appropriate to a financial expert. He would not admit to himself that he understood very little of what the aristocratic Mr. Eaton was setting forth.

"What are you planning to name the concern?" he asked.

Eaton removed his glasses and polished them reflectively. "The usual practice, I believe, is to name the car after the designer," he vouchsafed. "I am of the opinion that it should be known as the 'Eaton.'"

Lee was conscious of a slight waning of his enthusiasm.

"I'll think it over," he said at the conclusion of their conference. "I'm not sure that the automobile industry isn't already overdone in Detroit. It's harder than it was to get lines of credit at the banks."

Eaton seemed not one whit anxious. "Very likely," he acquiesced. "At any rate, I must know the situation within the next few days. I don't feel that I can hold the matter open much longer."

Lee took a few of the blue prints, and jotted down some of the designer's estimates.

"I'll see what I can do," he promised.

His first impression of the project had been distinctly favorable. It seemed to present exactly the right opportunity for his abilities. He visualised a great new concrete-and-glass automobile factory, thousands of mechanics within its walls, a phenomenal production and sale of cars, a record-breaking prosperity. Then he pictured the mahogany furniture and panelling of the president's office. He saw himself sitting at the president's desk, scores of subordinates hurrying to him for his quick decisions, his hand on the throttle of the mighty industry. Lee Hillquit, the new Automobile King! His fame would encompass the globe.

An unpleasant thought obtruded. Eaton wanted the new automobile and the new company named after himself. It

would be the name of Eaton, not Hillquit, that would become known to the Hottentot and the Esquimau. Perhaps the Bostoner might lay claim to the presidency, too. If a man was unreasonable in one thing, he might very well prove the same in all things.

Lee went over the ground with some care, nevertheless. Alfred Durham, who was still chief designer *emeritus* of the Durham Company, was in Europe on a vacation; but Lee submitted the Eaton design to Hal Conrad, Durham's first assistant, and to a few other automobile men of his acquaintance.

Opinions differed widely. Conrad declared that Eaton's plans were quite unoriginal. "There's nothing new here," he adjudged. "As to the opportunity in Detroit for a new medium-priced car, I really don't know."

Other experts were more encouraging. The sales manager of one of the largest automobile companies in the city enthused over the blue-prints.

"I've never seen such beautiful lines," he announced. "I think the car would create a sensation."

Still others, while not so enamored of Eaton's design, pronounced it perfectly sound, and assured Lee that there was plenty of room for a new car in the twelve hundred dollar class.

The cashier of Lee's bank rather threw cold water on the project.

"I'd stay out," he said. "You'll make more money in real estate. Besides, we're loaded up to the gills on motor credits already. We couldn't help you much."

The third day after his talk with Eaton, Lee told Fred Badger he had made up his mind not to go in on the proposition.

Fred betrayed keen chagrin. "That's too bad," he brooded. "Eaton will be disappointed. You made a big

hit with him. He said you had all the earmarks of a financial genius."

"Well, I liked him, too," hastened Lee. "I judge that he's a brilliant designer. But for one thing, I believe he's putting too high a price on his plans."

Fred looked puzzled.

"He wants the company and the car named after himself," Lee went on, "and I suspect he'll want too big a percentage of the stock. No capitalist is going to put money into the concern on those terms."

"Well, I don't think Eaton is so set on having the car named after himself," said Fred slowly. "Personally, I think it should be named after you, or whoever finances the company. As to how much stock Eaton wants, of course I can't say, but I think he might listen to reason."

At Lee's suggestion, Fred had another talk with Eaton; and a day or two later, the three met for lunch again.

"I've given further consideration to the question of the name of the new corporation," announced Eaton almost at once. "My present thought is that it would be better to employ the name of some prominent Detroiter, such as yourself. If you, for example, should decide to back the company, I should be in favor of calling it the Hillquit Motor Company, and naming the car the 'Hillquit,' instead of the 'Eaton.'"

"Well, I don't know," Lee debated, though inwardly he was intensely gratified. "As far as I am concerned, I care nothing about the honor; but possibly the company might gain some prestige by having my name at the head."

"Precisely," said Eaton, and a look of understanding passed between them.

Then—in one of those flashes of perfect insight that come only to Masters of Finance—Lee decided that he would go in on the proposition.

Before they left the table, they had agreed on the rough

outlines of organisation. The Hillquit Motor Company was to be capitalised at one million dollars. Lee agreed to put in three hundred and fifty thousand dollars within sixty days, and he was given a year's option on an additional hundred and fifty thousand dollars worth of stock. Will Eaton wanted one hundred thousand dollars in stock, outright, for his designs, and a contract whereby he might purchase a second hundred thousand dollar block on easy terms. Lee felt that these demands were rather unreasonable; but Eaton had been so magnanimous about the name of the concern that he hesitated to quibble with him. The remaining three hundred thousand dollars of stock was to be sold to outsiders by Fred Badger at a profitable commission. Fred was also to receive a goodly block of stock from Eaton in return for his efforts in promoting the corporation. Lee was slated to become president, Eaton vice-president and chief designer, and Fred Badger secretary and treasurer.

The formal incorporation occurred within a week, and then Lee sent for the reporters. The afternoon papers ran first page stories on the new company. For a day or two, Lee had his fill of publicity. He could not open a newspaper without coming upon a photograph of himself. The press referred to him as a "Thirty-year-old Napoleon," "Detroit's Youngest Motor Marvel"; and while he adopted a deprecating attitude in public, his secret enjoyment of his fame was enormous.

But it cost him a severe pang to dispose of enough of his property to raise the stipulated three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. After some reflection, he sold two-thirds of his Durham Motor stock for one hundred and ten thousand dollars, and over half of his Woodward Avenue frontage for one hundred and eighty thousand. The remaining sixty thousand dollars he secured by mortgaging the balance of his real estate.

The Hillquit Company's preparations went on apace.

Before hot weather set in, Fred Badger had placed most of the three hundred thousand dollar block of stock. By August 1st, 1914, the corporation had purchased and equipped a west-side factory. Automobile parts began pouring in—the "Hillquit" was to be largely an assembled car, at first; and at exactly twenty-seven minutes after three o'clock on the afternoon of October the fifth, the first Hillquit touring car, resplendent in glossy paint and gleaming nickel and brass, was trundled out of the shipping room door, and to the accompaniment of the hoarse factory whistle, turned over to President Hillquit, for a triumphal drive through the downtown streets.

It was purely incidental that Lee could not, for the life of him, make the car budge. The newspapers were induced to make no mention of the fact; and the moving picture photographers obligingly "killed" their films from the point where Lee, at the conclusion of the preliminary ceremonies, resumed his top hat and clambered into the refractory automobile.

VI

BEING president of a large motor corporation, Lee speedily discovered, was quite different than he had imagined. The picture that had taken form in his mind was thoroughly alluring: he had been captivated at the prospect of vast power, countless deferential assistants, enormous prestige. The spectacular aspect of high office had appealed to him. He had visualised himself in a hundred impressive poses. But the actuality was far from titillating. The responsibility of making portentous decisions gave him no fine thrill at all; it was just hard work, monotonous, fatiguing, prosaic. Opportunities for showing off were few and far between. He was wholly lacking in administrative experience, and he had no first-hand knowledge of the automobile business whatever. Accordingly, he found himself referring more and more decisions to Will Eaton.

But though Lee knew nothing of shop management and the various processes of manufacturing, he really could qualify as an advertising expert. Incidentally, he had picked up some understanding of salesmanship. Therefore, he gravitated slowly toward the publicity and sales departments. Some of the advertising copy that he turned out during the winter was extraordinarily good. Howard Doman and a number of other well-known "ad-men" wrote him letters of appreciation. The sales department, also, felt his energising touch. Within six months he had organised a first-rate selling force throughout the country.

All in all, in spite of his frustrated posings and his growing sense of ineptitude, Lee's new career thoroughly absorbed him during those first months of the Hillquit Motor

Company's existence. It was incredible to him that he had not always known the feeling of affluence and power. The past took on a dream-like quality.

Then abruptly, this self-same past reached out from the limbo of forgotten things and laid its hands violently upon him. Within a few days of each other, two incidents furrowed their way across his life—incidents quite dissimilar, yet curiously alike.

One evening Lee left the factory very late. Usually, he carried one or more passengers in his limousine, but tonight, he was alone.

He noted that it was seven o'clock, and an idea came to him. He told the chauffeur to drive down Woodward avenue, instead of directly home.

It was snowing heavily, and he glanced at the people hurrying along through the storm.

At Grand Circus Park, he left the limousine.

"Tell the housekeeper I'm dining downtown," he directed the surprised driver.

He was in an impressionable mood—for the first time in months. The large soft flakes of snow sifting down thickly, the multitudes of people all mantled heavily in white, the hundreds of lights shining mystically through the trees from the windows of the new skyscrapers about the Park: these and countless other sights and sounds impinged suggestively upon his consciousness.

All at once he became aware that he had paused, as if from force of habit, opposite the door of a certain café which had served as the favorite *rendezvous* of Ellwood James and himself three or four years ago. The spectacle of the familiar electric sign aroused a definite curiosity in him. He wondered what kind of an appeal this café and the things it represented could make to him now.

His old crony, the head-captain, had disappeared. Even the girl who checked his coat and hat was a stranger. The

whole place seemed unfamiliar. The habitués looked very much the same, and the same old sort of an orchestra was wrenching out plangent dance music. But everything was different, nevertheless. The old gilded pilasters, the colored lights, the illuminated fountain seemed garish. The air he breathed was stuffy. The people he watched were noisily vulgar, the laughter of the bedizened women irritatingly strident.

Then it dawned upon him that the change was in himself. He marvelled that he could have found his life with Ellwood so inescapable. Perhaps it was the necromancy of alcohol that had made this stupid place seem alluring—a haven of refuge from the despair that racked him in those days.

His dinner was poorly cooked and poorly served. He paid the check and started out, with a taste of complete disillusionment.

Near the door he passed a table where sat Ellwood James. Their eyes met at the same instant, and Lee stopped.

He had not encountered the light-hearted young philanthropist for two years, and he was struck with the change in his old friend's appearance. Ellwood looked indescribably world-worn. It was as if some gigantic wheel had caught him, twisted and broken him. His face was thin and weary. One eye seemed to sag a little in its socket; both eyes were luminous and large-pupilled, like those of a confirmed alcoholic. Furrows of exhaustion quivered in his cheeks. Tiny vertical veins stood out over his temples. His quondam effervescence had wholly deserted him; his expression was lifeless, dead.

They stood for a moment taking stock of each other: Ellwood endeavoring to re-capture some of his old buoyancy; Lee, with his new self-important briskness, restraining his disapproval as best he could.

"Sit down a moment, won't you?" Ellwood suggested.

For the first time, Lee took note of the woman at the table.

"May I present Mr. Hillquit," introduced Ellwood. "Mrs. Baynes."

Lee bowed rather stiffly. His impression of Mrs. Baynes was distinctly unfavorable. She was a thin woman of about twenty-five or thirty. She wore a black veil that partly concealed the upper part of her face; but he could see that her eyes were flecked with the marks of dissipation. The flesh of her face appeared flabby underneath its coating of rouge. She suggested ill-health, disease.

He pleaded another engagement, but added: "I'd like to have a talk with you sometime soon, Ellwood."

Lee purposely appointed his own house as the place for the meeting that took place two nights later. He wanted to get Ellwood out of the café atmosphere, and then put forth a final effort to awaken him to the folly of his ways.

His motives were purely altruistic, and he worked himself up to a genuine eloquence.

"The only thing for you to do," he expounded, "is to cut clear of Mrs. What's-her-name and all creatures like her. They're simply dragging you down."

For the first time that evening, Ellwood exhibited a flicker of interest.

"Mrs. Baynes?" he asked. "That reminds me—I was going to get your advice about her."

Annette Baynes, he recounted, was a divorced woman he had met a few months back. In some way, she challenged Ellwood's prowess as a woman-hunter. Her conquest, however, had not proved especially difficult for him, and he confessed that he was beginning to be bored. In fact, he had planned breaking off with her the very night that Lee encountered them.

"Just before you came along," went on Ellwood casually,

"Annette told me the cheerful news that I was soon to become a father."

"An absolute lie, probably!" broke in Lee.

Ellwood shook his head. "That was my first hunch, of course. But there's no doubt about it—I made sure of that. Understand—she didn't threaten me. She wasn't nasty about it. She just told me. That's why I feel it's up to me."

"There are ways——" began Lee.

"No," said the young physician. "In the first place, she wouldn't consent to any funny business, and in the second place, I wouldn't ask her to." He was silent a moment. "The more I think about it," he added, "the more I believe I'll kick through."

"What do you mean—marry her?" Lee exclaimed in a horrified voice.

Ellwood nodded.

"Marry a woman like that! Why, it's simply frightful!" Lee started to pace the room in high excitement. "How do you know you're the one who's responsible, anyway?"

"I don't," said Ellwood with an odd smile. "She says there's no one else, and I'm inclined to believe her. Anyway, it's up to me, and I'm not going to be a poor sport."

"I don't see it that way for a minute!" disagreed Lee. "You weren't any more to blame than she, were you? She isn't any young girl, you know. Don't be Quixotic. Just think of what it will mean to be tied up to a woman like that for the rest of your life. Marriage is enough of a gamble, God knows, even with a good woman; but a marriage like this will be sure Hell, that's all. You'll be ruined professionally and socially. Your neighbors won't call."

But Ellwood continued shaking his head, unconvinced. "I'm not so sure. Women are all about the same, once you get rid of your illusions. They may wear different clothes and different manners, but you don't marry clothes and man-

ners. No, Lee, I haven't any foolish notions about Annette's being a spotless lamb; but I really think I have as good a chance of working out a decent relationship with her as with any of your so-called society girls. I don't kid myself that Annette and I will spend much time riding through purple clouds, but anyway we won't suffer from disillusionment about each other." Again his odd smile. "Besides, you know, I really do want some children."

An unmistakable dignity had come into Ellwood's voice and manner. Lee abruptly fell silent.

Only a day or so later he heard from Vera. She telephoned him at the factory and asked him if he could come to see her. He promised to stop on his way home that night.

He had not seen her since their one tragic meeting three years before. He had often found himself wondering about her. Memories of her seemed to spring into his mind on the smallest provocation—a voice, a mannerism, a face that even remotely resembled hers. Such recollections he had always put aside sternly. He still cherished the grievance of her disloyalty to him. Yet her memory had persisted, subtly, impalpably.

He found her in a cheaper neighborhood than before. A shiver of aversion came over him as he mounted the dark and stuffy stairs and made his way back to the last door in the hall-way. Nor did his aversion lessen when he caught sight of Vera. She proved to be considerably stouter, and there was a look of dumb misery in her eyes. Almost at once she told him that she was pregnant.

Lee sat down in a rocking chair, hat in hand, and listened to the details of the sordid pitiful story she unfolded. A year after she came to the city, her husband had learned her address and thenceforth had allowed her no respite. He made it clear that he intended to force her to return to Record and live with him. Vera had received abusive,

threatening letters from him each week. Milo's lawyer—and even the prosecuting attorney of the county, a political crony of the elder Higginson—had joined in trying to frighten her into submission.

"But I didn't think there was any law that could make me live with him," Vera said, "and I never paid any attention to their letters." She spoke quietly, with a dull impassivity.

When letters failed of their mark, Milo at length began coming to Detroit. "I caught sight of him once or twice, slinking along behind me on my way home from the theatre at night. My landlady said some man was calling up the house while I was away and making vague threats. Several times I could have sworn he was in the theatre."

Lee's aloof distaste began to melt away. "Why didn't you let me know?" he asked. "I could have scared the life out of him."

"I didn't want to drag you into the mess," she said. "Besides I've never been afraid of men—Milo, least of all. He hasn't any real courage."

Then came the unexpected disaster. One night, about six months before, she had found him waiting for her in her room. "Even then I wasn't at all frightened, until he came close to me and I smelled the whisky he'd bolstered himself up with. He locked the door and told me it was my last chance to go back to Record with him. Then he pulled out a revolver and asked me what my answer was. I told him no."

It seemed incredible to Lee that he was sitting in this almost squalid back bedroom, listening with outward calm to Vera's listless recital. He gave a slight start, as if to assure himself of the reality of the thing.

Vera went on. "He said I still belonged to him and he intended to have his legal rights, either in Record or in

Detroit, he didn't care so much which. Even then I didn't realise what he meant—till he took me by the throat."

She had fought back hard, but Milo had finally overpowered her—crushed her into insensibility. "When I finally came to, he'd gone—and the landlady was standing by the bed, telling me to get out of the house quick—she didn't want any such women around her place."

When she learned the truth about her condition, she had been terror-stricken for a time. "I felt almost like giving up," she said. Until a week ago, she had been able to support herself by playing at the "movie"; but now her plight was becoming obvious. She hated to appear on the street. Her new landlady was openly suspicious.

Lee suddenly stood up. It seemed more than he could bear.

"Does any one know?" he asked. "Your family?"

"Not a soul—except the doctor. As for my father and mother—well, I'm as good as dead to them."

Subsequent messages from Milo had threatened further treatment of the same sort unless she returned to him. She showed Lee a letter she had just received, bearing the ultimatum that he would call on her the following day, and if she had not changed her mind, would swear out a warrant for her arrest. "I'll break your damn back for you yet, old gurl," the letter concluded.

"You see," said Vera with a pathetic gesture of weakness. "I realise I can't stand alone much longer, and you're the only one I can turn to. I have almost no money left, and I won't be able to earn any more from now on."

Lee turned toward the door with set jaws. "You need have no further worry," he assured her, "either about Milo or about money."

"Thank you," she said—and for a moment he thought she was going to cry. But she suddenly recovered herself. "Understand, Lee—I won't take a cent from you. But he's

responsible for my not being able to work—he's the one who must do something."

Lee took his leave, oscillating between intense irritation at the disagreeable duty he had undertaken, and an odd, vague sense of affectionate comradeship with Vera. Strange, the force of this obscure tie between them, woven out of their old love for one another—as if the close and precious communion of Chatham days still survived the disintegrating and disillusioning years that had intervened. He could not but be conscious of a trust neglected. He ought to have looked after Vera—helped her. Profound pity and sympathy for her suffused him.

Instead of going home, he drove to one of his downtown clubs. There he was fortunate enough to find his very good friend, the Police Commissioner, alone at dinner—with the result that Milo Higginson, arriving at the Michigan Central station that night, was promptly picked up by two very intelligent and discreet detectives and made to languish till morning in a cell at headquarters.

There was very little pride or fight left in the son of Record's chief banker the next day when he was brought into the Commissioner's office and left alone with Lee. Their conference was neither long nor inconclusive. Milo promptly secured three hundred dollars by telegraph and deposited it with Lee, as a partial payment of Vera's medical and hospital expenses. Verbally he agreed, under pain of a criminal prosecution for his assault, to send her twenty dollars a week after the baby's birth, and to interpose no objection to her suit for divorce.

This done, Milo—a very peculiar discoloration beginning to manifest itself around his left eye—was escorted back to the railway station and placed aboard an outgoing train by the same two detectives.

Vera surprised Lee by refusing absolutely to take the agreed alimony.

"How can I when I loathe him so?" she demanded. "All I want from him is what I'm justly entitled to: enough money to see me through the baby's birth. I'll take his three hundred dollars. After that I'll ask favors of no one. I can support both the baby and myself." She repaid Lee for all his trouble with her smile of new courage. "I'm going to make something of myself yet, Lee—and I'm going to make something of that baby, too."

He looked slightly troubled. "But—are you sure it's wise for you to keep it?" he asked.

Vera had been strangely apathetic about the whole wretched business; but now she surveyed Lee fiercely.

"The baby? Why, of course I'm going to keep it! I'd like to see anybody take it away from me!"

VII

THE first season of the Hillquit Motor Company was not an undiluted success.

The trouble lay in the manufacturing end. Instead of turning out ten thousand cars, Eaton completed a scant five thousand. Persistent trouble developed in the car's rear axle, and it became necessary to take a great many machines back and make costly adjustments on others. Eaton, however, pronounced these difficulties a part of the first year's experience of every automobile company, and he predicted a phenomenal success for the second season beginning August 1st, 1915.

Indeed, prospects were highly promising. Lee's distinctive advertising campaign had created a real demand for the "Hillquit." The sales agents eagerly contracted for twenty thousand of the new cars. Eaton announced that he had entirely remedied the rear axle trouble and improved the design materially.

The corporation had lost very little money up to date; but as spring came on and additional capital was required, Lee found it necessary to apply to the bank for an extension of credit from one hundred thousand dollars to two hundred and fifty thousand.

The bank directors proved unenthusiastic. "We're loaded up on motor loans," the vice-president reported to Lee. "So are all the other banks in town."

The final outcome was that the bank agreed to allow the new credit only upon Lee's personal endorsement of the notes.

Lee called a meeting of the board of directors of the Hillquit Company, and laid the situation before them.

"We might increase the capitalisation and sell more stock," suggested Will Eaton. "But that means splitting future profits with more people. I really don't think you'd be running any risk at all in endorsing the notes. By the time they fall due, we'll have more money than we know how to use. If my endorsement were worth anything to the bank, I'd be glad to give it."

"How about you?" Lee asked Fred Badger. "Are you willing to go on this paper with me?"

"I'd be glad to, if my endorsement had any value," Fred assured him. "Unfortunately, I'm sewed up in several things right now that take every penny I can earn."

"I don't feel like taking the risk all alone," protested Lee. "I suppose the bank would really look to me if the notes weren't paid, but all the same, I'd like to have you fellows sign too."

Eaton and Fred finally agreed to this; but on April first, the day appointed for negotiating the loan, Fred Badger telegraphed from Chicago that he had been unexpectedly called out of town, but would return the next day. Lee and Eaton endorsed the new notes; and upon Fred's re-appearance, Lee insisted that he also sign. After many delays, Fred added his name as an endorser.

Lee felt some uneasiness about the situation. In addition to his initial investment of three hundred and fifty thousand, he was now liable on the corporation's notes, due October first, in the amount of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. If anything happened to the company, Lee's entire fortune would be wiped out.

Although his misgivings were slight, he began to retrench in his personal expenditures. A year before, he had purchased eighty acres of land in the Bloomfield Hills section, twenty miles north of the city; and he had already secured architect's plans for a country house that would cost him about one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. He deter-

mined to delay the actual construction of the house for the immediate present.

One June morning Lee found in his personal mail an engraved announcement that Eleanor B. Badger had opened a landscape architect's office on the tenth floor of a downtown building.

He sat staring at the card a moment, slightly inquisitive; then had his secretary telephone Eleanor.

"Yes," came a woman's voice.

"This is Lee Hillquit, and I've just gotten your announcement. Do you mean to say you're designing gardens and all that sort of thing professionally?"

"Goodness, yes!" confirmed Eleanor. "I've been at the game almost two years now. By the way, I understand you are going to build a country house soon."

He explained that his plans were indefinite. "I may begin this summer, and I may not. Perhaps I shall want to get your advice."

"Very glad to give it," said Eleanor and rang off.

Lee considered it odd that Fred had not spoken of his sister's new vocation. Now that he thought of it, he hadn't heard Fred mention Eleanor's name for many months.

The next time he happened to be in that particular building, he made a point of going to Eleanor's office.

He found that she occupied an impressive suite, in company with a well-known architect. He gave his name to the stenographer, and presently was ushered into Eleanor's private office. She was sitting at a flat-top desk, littered with papers and blue-prints; but as he entered, she stood up and held out her hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Hillquit," she greeted. "I'm very glad to see you again."

Her expression—that was what had so altered since he had last seen her. Her actual features, under their coat of early tan, were much the same—the same direct blue eyes

with the clear whites; the same straight nose, coming out from her forehead at precisely the proper angle; the same sane mouth, a little too wide, perhaps. Her tailored suit was smart and fitted her beautifully. But it was the change in her expression that held his attention. The old cynical, stifled look had vanished. Here manifestly was a very independent young woman, entirely free from morbid self-consciousness—with an immense interest in the work she was doing. Her self-confidence made him think of Fred.

She began talking business at once. She had taken a number of art courses in college, she explained; and shortly after her last talk with Lee, she had become fired with an ambition to become a landscape architect. She had taken a two years' course in an eastern university and served an apprenticeship in a Detroit architect's office. She showed him photographs of the work she had done for her clients, and elicited the plans for his country estate. He asked her one or two personal questions about herself, but she returned to professional matters so tactfully that he did not realise, till he stood up to go, that he had not at all succeeded in satisfying the faint prick of curiosity that had brought him to her office.

"It's odd I've heard your brother say nothing about your professional work," he hazarded.

"Fred?" She raised her shoulders indifferently. "That's not so surprising. He's not very proud of my professional career—keeps asking me to give it up, stay home and be a 'nice girl' again. But now that I've started to make a little money, he's beginning to soften a bit, I can see."

"And do you really enjoy being a working girl as much as you expected?" pursued Lee quizzically.

She smiled back at him triumphantly. "More. I'd sell my soul any day for real professional success. The only trouble is that most Detroit people won't take a woman's professional work seriously. You've no idea the prejudice

I've had to go up against." She recovered her impersonal attitude abruptly. "But this isn't paying office rent, is it?" She glanced at her wrist-watch. "You'll excuse me now," she said briskly. "I have a planting job at Grosse Pointe that simply must be finished to-day. But I'm awfully interested in your plans, and I think something stunning could be worked out."

Lee walked with her to the elevator. "Can't I give you a lift out to the Pointe?" he heard himself asking.

"No, thanks. I have a little Durham runabout," she explained. "I did drive a Hillquit," she added with a laugh, "but I had so much trouble with it, I finally had to trade it in for a car I could depend on."

He made some light reply, and they parted at the entrance to the building. He saw her step lithely into her car, start the motor and drive off. It was a new experience for him to be handled in such cavalier fashion, and he sought out his own limousine, at once puzzled and interested by her off-hand manner with him.

VIII

PERHAPS it was the humid warmth of the June days—or possibly, his worry over the affairs of the Hillquit Motor Company. Again, the serene and self-assured spirit that he had encountered in Eleanor Badger may have had something to do with it.

At any rate, Lee found himself in the grip of a new restlessness. His work at the factory seemed mere drudgery, shot through with multiplying anxieties. He felt tired, depressed. He could get no lift from the sense of his prosperity and power. Even his advertising work palled.

But these vague stirrings did not focus until he picked up his newspaper one morning and read of the death of Michael Curran.

The old department-store magnate had last been seen three evenings before on a Belle Isle ferry boat. His failure to reappear at his residence within the next thirty-six hours found its way into the newspapers. Then a deck-hand on the ferry boat remembered having heard a slight splash in the water, just after the boat left the island dock on its last trip. That afternoon, the harbor master began to drag the river bottom, and late at night, brought up Michael Curran's body a few rods below the spot identified by the deck-hand.

The morning paper printed a picture and a long obituary. The last paragraphs read:

Mr. Curran's death was presumably accidental. He was in the best of health, and had no financial worries. How he could have fallen overboard without being seen by some one is a mystery.

Mr. Curran's estate is variously estimated at from one to five millions.

Coroner Phillips said there would be no inquest.

As Lee read the details, there arose in his mind a picture of the old Irishman as he last remembered him—wandering like a lost wraith about the store where he had once held undisputed sway. He dropped in to see Howard Doman.

"Poor old Mike!" said the merchandise manager. "I've felt mighty sorry for him lately. He just didn't have any more function in life. He couldn't run the business and he was too old for women. I've foreseen his suicide for the last month."

"Suicide!" Lee interjected.

Doman nodded. "Not the faintest doubt. A boy on the boat saw him climbing over the railing on the lower deck. Mike's eyes were staring, and the kid was so scared he didn't say anything about it till to-day. Of course, we kept it out of the papers."

Lee went away, more depressed than ever.

"Money and women." He recalled Doman's apt characterisation. That epitomised Curran's whole life—and his desolate end. Lee thought of the man, with all his ability, his flashes of insight, his constructive imagination, his force and power, his sense of humor.

Money and women—nothing else. No fine purpose, no gleam of unselfishness, no flow of spirituality.

Money and women. Lee wondered if the phrase did not sum up his own life thus far. True, he was through with women, but he lived and breathed for money and its by-products.

He took a searching look into the big mirror in his office. It was the first time he had really taken stock of himself in years. His eye skipped negligently over the details of his appearance: the trim lines of his suit, artfully concealing the incipient stoutness of his waist-line; the expensive

shirt and cravat; the lines of his face, the furrows in his forehead, the few grey hairs on his temples. His eyes were tired, but not dissipated looking. Business cares and anxieties accounted for that woeful sagging in the corners of his mouth. But the crying unhappiness of his whole expression—that was what caught him up short.

What did it all mean? He had no apparent reason to be unhappy. He was living a virtuous, industrious life; he was successful, influential—highly regarded by the whole city.

That afternoon, he left his limousine at Grand Circus Park a second time, and started down Woodward avenue.

Nearly every man and woman he passed bore his own jaded, thwarted expression. A sea of sad faces. Only a few of the children looked happy.

He took note of the people in limousines—people of wealth and position, many of whom he knew. Their faces had never before seemed so common, so unimaginative—most of all, so sombre. Stupid, over-fed people, most of them, with greedy bodies but ungreedy minds: they possessed everything in life that money could buy; they flung their wealth in the faces of the envious, gaping pedestrians; yet their dull visages showed no glimmer of joyousness. Money and women, those were the false illusions that had spread the mark of chagrin over all these faces. Money, anyway. How they all schemed and laid traps for it! Money! That was the only standard of success. Money! That was the magic talisman that would bring perfect happiness! Money! The hundreds who failed in its pursuit were wholly wretched; yet the few who achieved its quest looked even more cheated than those who failed.

Lee took a street car home, and sat down in his luxuriously furnished library. A dull despair pervaded him.

Perhaps those morbid German philosophers were right after all; and the only real art of living consisted of learning to exist without happiness.

PART FOUR

I

AUGUST first, 1915—the beginning of the 1916 automobile season—arrived in due time. Will Eaton had announced a daily output of one hundred cars for the new season, but when the five o'clock whistle blew, not a single automobile was ready for shipment. A week, then a full month went by before Lee woke up to the fact that something was seriously wrong.

It was not alone the fact that the entire proposed output—twenty thousand cars—had been contracted for, and that the efficient sales representatives he had so carefully picked were sending in sharp telegrams of inquiry every day. Rather, it was the uncertainty as to when production would actually begin that brought new lines of worry to his face.

The chief trouble, Eaton explained, was delay in the receipt of certain parts. The Hillquit was still an assembled car—that is, the company contracted for most of the parts of the automobile, and merely put them together in the Detroit factory. The gasoline engine, the steering wheel, the axles and certain other parts came from Detroit concerns; the remaining parts from other cities.

When Lee really started investigating, he soon found that only one-half of the necessary parts had arrived at the plant. Eaton excused his failure to inform Lee earlier by saying that he had been expecting all the lacking parts to appear every day.

"But damn it, Eaton!" Lee burst out. "We've got to

get started right away—don't you see? Here it is September already! Every day we're receiving bills for the parts that are here, and we won't have a cent to pay them with, till we begin shipping cars."

Eaton shrugged his shoulders in an offended way. "I'm sure I've done everything possible to get action," he said. "Anyway, that end of the business is up to you and Fred Badger. My part of the car, the design, is beyond criticism."

Fred Badger had not been at the plant for two days, Lee discovered.

He sent hurriedly for the contracts that covered the missing automobile parts. Without exception, they provided that deliveries to the Hillquit Company should begin prior to August first.

He telephoned to the two Detroit concerns that were on the delinquent list.

"We're sorry, Mr. Hillquit," they both professed. "But we've been delayed by the people who furnish us material. Your order is going through now all right. It's only a matter of a few days more."

"I notice you didn't seem to have any difficulty filling the Durham order on time," Lee told the vice-president of the company that supplied self-starters.

"Well, that's a little different proposition, Mr. Hillquit," reasoned the vice-president. "We took on the Durham people long before we did you."

"That doesn't make the slightest difference!" Lee vociferated. "Now I want that stuff out right away, or we'll cancel our contract with you."

The vice-president refused to be ruffled. "All right. Suppose we do cancel. It would relieve a lot of the congestion out here."

It occurred to Lee that this particular starter had been especially designed to fit into the type of engine used in

the Hillquit car, and that no other starter would prove adaptable to Eaton's design.

"You think you have us where you want us," he accused the vice-president. "You may change your mind if we find it necessary to start suit against you."

But Malcomson, the Hillquit Company's attorney, gave him small satisfaction.

"Of course, you *can* sue," he vouchsafed, "but it will be a year before the case is tried. And naturally, the self-starter people will throw up their contract with you, the minute you serve them with process."

"Do you mean to say there's no way of compelling those rough-necks to live up to their agreement?"

The lawyer pursed his lips quizzically. "No very efficient way, I'm afraid. If you had come to me before you signed these contracts, I might have put in a good stiff damages clause or something else that would have done the trick. As it is, your best chance is to kid them along into sending you the stuff."

Lee was at his wit's ends. He could evolve no solution of the grave straits that confronted the company. Worst of all, he could get no help at all from his associates. Fred Badger could never be located when he was most wanted, and the Scion of "one of Boston's best families, you know," withdrew more and more into his shell as problems multiplied. Lee saw financial ruin staring him in the face.

Then, quite inexplicably, things unknotted themselves. The starters arrived and other parts began rolling in. By the second week in September, every missing constituent was on hand, except the specially designed carburetors—and they were reported en route from Chicago.

Lee breathed more easily, and Eaton thawed out perceptibly. A considerable portion of the season's profits had been irretrievably lost; but the danger of downright failure, seemed happily averted.

II

A WEEK or two after his visit to Eleanor's office, Lee had one day surprised himself by inviting her to lunch. She puzzled and piqued him, this young professional woman, with her measureless self-sufficiency and her novel "hands-off" air. Throughout the trying summer months, he contrived to see her with increasing frequency. When she went away in August for a short vacation, he was taken aback to discover how definitely he missed her companionship.

Just why he had come to depend on her, ever so slightly, was something of a mystery. He was not at all attracted to her in the usual ways. Eleanor possessed not the faintest vestige of what is called feminine alluringness. Certain things about her, indeed, he positively disliked: her indifference, for example, and her pains to make him realise that their friendship must always remain impersonal. Another somewhat nettling circumstance was Eleanor's proneness to spend half of their time together in a discussion of landscape plans for his country estate. Hardly a luncheon passed without the unostentatious production of blue-print designs and photographs of Italian, English or Japanese gardens.

Lee, to tell the truth, was very lonely these days—almost equally restless. He was thoroughly disillusioned with women, he felt—with none more so than the third-year-out "Society girls" who flattered and coquetted with him. Thus it came to pass that after a wry face or two over Eleanor's impersonal quality, Lee began to find this very trait the rarest and most appealing thing about her. It was very

restful, and a great relief, to discover a young woman to prove the exception to his firm conclusion that all be-skirted persons were innately personal; to encounter a charming companion with whom he could forget the crushing perplexities of business, without the fear of Sex, lurking somewhere about, ready to pounce out and spoil everything.

For Eleanor could be a charming companion. Hers was a mental sparkle that proved unfailingly diverting. She possessed brains without being at all ponderous. Giving her mind a novel, interesting idea to play with was like dropping a lighted match into tinder. She could become as excited over a Whistler Nocturne or a piece of iridescent pottery as could most girls of Lee's acquaintance over the most thrilling of love affairs or the newest of gowns. At times, Lee was not above starting arguments with her for no other purpose than to watch her blue eyes enkindle.

She was a new type of woman to him; and that of course served to heighten her attractiveness. He could not place her. When he thought of professional women, the picture of a mannish, ungraceful species rose before his eyes. He had come upon a few such, and he remembered with aversion their slouchy suits, their "sensible" shoes and dowdy hats. Eleanor was every whit as impersonal as these others; she yielded an exclusive devotion to her work. But she had retained her pride of dress and body. Evidently she did not hold it necessary to sacrifice personal charm to her strict professional attitude.

Yes, she was a fine frank spirit who somehow pulled him up a little out of the depths. Yet it was perfectly clear to him that he was not in the least in love with her—nor she with him, thank Heaven. All possibility of real love was over for him. His first fine affection for Vera could never be duplicated, he felt. More than once he caught himself repressing an inward groan as he thought of his earlier innocence of soul, now irrevocably lost.

To help deaden this half-realised need of his for a great love, Eleanor and her friendship seemed to serve admirably. They saw each other with increasing frequency after her return to the city. A year ago, he would have pronounced such a relationship between a man and woman impossible. Never did either of them trespass in spirit beyond the precincts of mere friendship. Never for an instant did Lee confuse his high admiration for Eleanor and his dependence on her comradeship for any other emotion—nor did Eleanor.

So secure did he feel on this score that he could not refrain from an occasional humorous comment on their relationship.

"I really believe the only reason you lunch with me is to sell me an expensive garden," he complained. "That's all you're really interested in—now isn't it?"

To his amused surprise, she flushed a little, then managed a really charming smile. "Do you honestly think there are so many congenial men in Detroit?"

A week or two later, Lee learned with some disquietude that his friendship with Eleanor had become the subject of considerable gossip. One or two of his fellow club-members chaffed him goodnaturedly on the forthcoming announcement of his engagement. It was thoroughly understood that he was open to congratulations. Other similar intimations reached him in round-about ways.

Lee received this raillery with light denials, outwardly. Inwardly he was dismayed. He possessed to the utmost the usual masculine aversion to being talked about, to placing any woman in an equivocal situation. Yet it seemed to him the height of absurdity to think of sacrificing his precious friendship with Eleanor. He felt he needed it now more than ever. As his business affairs grew more desperate, he counted more and more heavily on the solace of her companionship.

The fairest solution was to submit the problem to Eleanor,

he concluded. "If she knows about it, and doesn't mind," he reasoned, "things can go on as they are. We're both adults, and it's our own business."

Three nights later, at their favorite corner table in the city's most conservative café, matters came to a swift and surprising decision.

Hardly had the waiter made off with the finger-bowls and his tip when Eleanor contrived to bring the conversation to the subject of his new country estate.

"Now see here!" protested Lee in mock indignation. "I don't want to see a blue-print to-night. You're as bad as Brother Fred. There's something else I want to talk to you about."

A conscientious 'bus-boy intervened just then with a match-stand. Lee glanced out of the café window at the gloom-enshrouded figures of hurrying passers-by, the dazzling headlights of automobiles, the slowly moving street cars—all the teeming life of the city. He was painfully agitated and somewhat depressed. Never before had he needed Eleanor's reassurance so acutely. His day at the factory had been nerve-racking—the trouble over the self-starters had reached a climax; and this, together with his unpleasant task of relating the gossip about them, had brought him close to the breaking-point.

He met Eleanor's appraising eye. "As a matter of fact, I doubt very much if I'll ever have that country house. Things at the factory seem to be going to smash about as fast as they can. I shouldn't wonder if I'd be glad to have any sort of a shack to hang my hat and coat in—let alone a country estate. But I know that can make no difference——"

"No country estate!"

Eleanor spoke so tensely that Lee stared. She bit her lips. "What is it?" he importuned.

"Nothing." She recovered her poise abruptly. "Except that I have something disagreeable to say to you."

Lee's stare widened.

"You and I have been seeing a lot of each other lately, and—well, we're both old enough to know what propinquity usually does to a man and woman. I see you understand. Now I have no intention of falling in love with any one, and so I think it's wiser for us to stop seeing each other."

Lee was nonplussed for an instant, then intensely humiliated. "You needn't have worried on my account," he answered curtly. "I wanted nothing but your friendship. Naturally, now that I have no Italian garden to plan——"

Eleanor stood up. "You can think that, of course."

They left the café and started for her house. Lee's anger oozed rapidly away, and a sense of abysmal loneliness overspread him. All his poignant unhappiness of soul, all his business anxieties seemed to culminate. He was filled with remorse over his ill-bred insinuation against Eleanor. Life had been endurable of late solely because of her, and now she too was forsaking him.

Against the background of his desolation, moreover, stood out sharply his utter perplexity. Why had Eleanor cut him off thus without warning and without compassion? It was not what she had said but her manner in saying it.

"I'm sorry—and I'm puzzled, Eleanor," he said as they reached her door.

"I shouldn't be." She rang the bell, then turned impassively toward him. "What you said about me wasn't wholly untrue. Some abnormal streak in me. The Badger strain, I guess. Perhaps I'm not so different from my dear brother, after all." She laughed enigmatically. "All he wants in life is money; all I care about is success. So, you see, I'm hardly worth being either sorry or puzzled about."

The maid opened the door, and Eleanor disappeared without saying good-night.

III

THE arrival of the missing automobile parts was so great a relief to Lee that he permitted two full weeks to elapse before he emerged from his sense of security to the realisation that the carburetors, in the design of which Eaton took such enormous pride, had not yet put in an appearance.

By now it was the latter part of September, and the situation had become much more serious than ever. Every day's delay was costing the company thousands of dollars. Several of the largest creditors had grown tired of writing urgent letters, and had placed their accounts with Detroit law firms. What with staving off lawyers, frantic sales representatives, and Dun and Bradstreet reporters, Lee led a hounded existence.

The bank's attitude troubled him especially. The notes for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars which he had endorsed were to mature October first, only a few days away. When he sounded the president and cashier about renewals, they were unexpectedly pessimistic.

"Of course, we'd like to accommodate you, Mr. Hillquit," they said, "but we feel we really ought to insist on payment of these notes."

"But it's practically impossible!" exclaimed Lee.

They surveyed his anxious face with apparent concern. "Suppose you pay half the face of notes," they compromised.

"That's also out of the question," he insisted.

After considerable debate, they agreed to renew the notes for sixty days. Lee and Will Eaton endorsed the new notes

October first, but Fred Badger was again absent from the city on that date, and did not affix his name until more than a week later.

Meanwhile, a thousand Hillquit cars—all there was room for—stood completely assembled in the factory, waiting only the final small constituent that would transform them from inanimate junk into something alive.

Lee kept the wires hot for a few days, then caught a sleeper to Chicago.

The president of the carburetor concern was a large aggressive individual with a tumid neck and a heavy bass voice. He resented Lee's belligerent tone, and they wrangled all day.

"Go as far as you like, Hillquit," said the carburetor manufacturer. "We have more profitable business on our books than we can possibly fill. We're doing the best we can with your order, and no amount of your bulldozing will help matters a particle."

"But just think, man!" Lee expostulated. "Your contract specifies July 15 as the date of our first shipment. You're almost three months late now. You've lost us a fortune already. It means bankruptcy if we don't get carburetors right away."

The president raised his eyebrows. "I've heard some talk about your being in hard shape." A crafty grin overspread his face. "Well, Hillquit, I don't see how you can expect us to break our necks getting out stuff for a doubtful concern like yours."

"Oh, we'll be all right, provided we can get carburetors," Lee asserted.

In the end, the aggressive president agreed to make a shipment by the middle of the following week, without fail. Lee returned to Detroit, hoping for the best. There was really very little more he could do. No ordinary carburetors—even if he could have bought them—would work

well with the Hillquit motor. Legal proceedings would only complicate matters, without procuring results.

The following Monday brought a disturbing letter from Chicago. It concluded as follows:

The investigation of your financial condition confirms our belief that we should be running too much of a risk if we made shipments to you on the usual terms of credit. We have therefore decided that we must ask for cash payments in advance of each shipment.

Lee's exasperation knew no bounds. It was the rawest kind of a hold-up, he felt. Besides, the Hillquit Company's bank balance was running uncomfortably low; there remained barely enough for two or three more pay-rolls.

Yet there seemed no solution save to comply; and Tuesday night, he mailed a New York draft for twelve thousand dollars covering a first shipment of two thousand carburetors. His accompanying letter implored immediate shipment.

An agonising fortnight dragged by without a sign of the carburetors.

On October 20th, Lee received a letter from a local attorney who represented the concern that had supplied rear axles. The account amounted to fifty thousand dollars, and the lawyer stated that unless he received payment in full on or before the twenty-fifth of the month, he would file a petition in bankruptcy against the Hillquit Company.

As Lee sat staring at the letter, a telegram was brought to his desk.

Chicago, Oct. 20, 1915.

HAVE SHIPPED ONE THOUSAND CARBURETORS
TO-DAY VIA MICHIGAN CENTRAL. ONE THOU-
SAND MORE SATURDAY.

SODERBERG CARBURETOR CO.

Lee rushed downtown to consult Alpheus Malcomson, the corporation's attorney.

"If they ever file that bankruptcy petition, it's all over with you people," commented the lawyer. "You see, you're really insolvent this minute. The only chance is to hold a meeting of all the creditors, and try to get them to agree to hold off another two months until you've had a chance to sell a few thousand cars."

He telephoned the lawyer who had threatened bankruptcy proceedings.

"Holderman says he'll wait until the creditors' meeting before he does anything," he announced, hanging up the receiver. "Now let's get busy."

Malcomson and Lee drew up a brief statement of the company's condition and mailed it to all the creditors, together with notice of a meeting to be held a week later in the directors' room of the Hillquit Company's bank.

Forty-two creditors—all but four of the entire list—were represented at the meeting. Alpheus Malcomson made a short opening statement setting forth the objects of the meeting. Then Lee related in detail the financial situation of the corporation.

"If you force us into bankruptcy," he concluded, "our stock will only bring junk prices, and you'll be lucky if you get ten cents on the dollar. But if you'll all take ninety-day notes for your claims, and give us a chance to finish and sell six or seven thousand cars, you'll get every cent that's coming to you."

One or two of the attorneys were disposed to ask embarrassing questions about the whys and wherefores of the corporation's insolvency, but the majority seemed to accede to Lee's views. When the final vote came, every creditor at the meeting agreed to an extension of three months, with the stipulation that the business was to be conducted under the advisory supervision of a committee of creditors.

Lee returned to the plant next morning, almost jubilant. He was confident that the worst was over. The first consignment of carburetors had come in a week ago, and already a thousand Hillquit cars had been shipped to voracious agents all over the country. The second thousand carburetors had arrived that very morning, he found. From now on, it seemed certain that the factory's output would be over one hundred cars a day.

At the end of November, prospects were even more hopeful. Thirty-six hundred machines had been assembled and shipped. Money was beginning to pour in from the sales agencies. Lee and Will Eaton were talking about adding another eight-hour shift and doubling the output.

On the thirteenth of November, shortly before noon, a telegram arrived from the Indianapolis agent:

MOTOR TROUBLE HAS DEVELOPED IN EVERY
CAR SOLD. THINK CARBURETOR IS FAULTY.
PLEASE SEND FACTORY EXPERT TO-NIGHT SURE

Lee scowled and handed the telegram to Eaton.

"Probably a very simple adjustment," commented the Bostoner. "Some of those agents can't fix even a punctured tire. I'll run down to Indianapolis myself, if necessary."

During the afternoon, three more telegrams came in from other cities announcing motor trouble. In the morning, five similar wires followed one another at brief intervals.

"What does it mean?" gasped Lee.

Eaton resorted to his injured expression. "How should I know? The carburetors are all right and the motors are equally so. Whatever the difficulty, you may rest assured it's not my fault."

Lee repressed an angry retort. "Better shoot down to Indianapolis to-night," he counselled. "It's probably some very simple matter, just as you suggest."

The next day, after Eaton's departure, his chief assistant entered Lee's office with a worried look.

"Riker, the Detroit sales agent, is on the wire," he set forth. "Says he's overrun with complaints about the motor. Do you think I'd better run down and have a look?"

"Yes, I do," said Lee grimly. "I also think I'd better go with you."

Riker was a tall, good-looking young man with the automobile salesman's characteristic optimism and "pep." But when he greeted Lee and the assistant designer, his expression was noticeably despondent.

"I've sold fifty cars so far this month, and every single owner is on my neck. It's getting my goat."

"What's the matter?" Lee demanded.

"The damned cars just won't run," vituperated Riker. "At least they won't run right. The motor seems to choke, and you can't get more than six miles out of a gallon of gas. No man can sell cars like that in 1915, believe me."

He led the way to the repair shop in the rear of the spacious sales-room, and paused at the side of a new touring car.

"Hop in," he directed, and drove them around the block.

Riker's description proved no exaggeration. The motor coughed, spat, jerked spasmodically.

Lee took the salesman aside.

"Just between you and me, Riker," he said, "what's the real trouble with these cars?"

Riker met his eye. "If you ask me—it's that fool carburetor. I don't know who's responsible for sticking a contraption like that on the engine—maybe you're the goat—but it's a cinch that the man who did it don't know anything about automobiles. The car's going to be a flat failure until you get a new carburetor. And that's the straight dope, Mr. Hillquit."

Lee found two more querulous telegrams waiting for him at his office.

It seemed to him that this new development was the

last straw. He felt like giving up. The company could weather no new storm, however slight.

Then he shut his jaws hard. Lee Hillquit, the "Motor Monarch," the "Boy Napoleon of Finance," beaten and discredited? No, it couldn't be. His remarkable abilities would pull the company through to success, even now.

For two more days, this obsession that somehow he was invincible, kept him fighting, planning.

On the third day, a deputy United States Marshal served him with notice that one of the four creditors not represented at the meeting had that morning filed a petition in bankruptcy against the Hillquit Motor Company.

IV

WITHIN the week, Lee was almost penniless again. Upon the advice of Alpheus Malcomson, the Hillquit Motor Company did not contest the bankruptcy proceedings.

"You're insolvent, all right," said the attorney, "and you'll only be wasting time and money if you put up a fight."

The company's failure automatically wiped out Lee's holdings of stock amounting to three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. In addition, the bank made claim against him on his endorsement of the company's note for one hundred and fifty thousand. For a day or so he made frantic efforts to force Fred Badger to contribute his share of this amount. Then Fred's attorney wrote to Lee setting forth that his client's endorsement was invalid because it had not been given until after the negotiation of the note, and that Fred therefore refused absolutely to make any settlement.

Will Eaton was uncollectible, and the whole burden devolved on Lee. The bank was already a heavy loser on the company's unendorsed notes, and Lee felt obligated to make prompt settlement of his personal indebtedness. He turned over everything he possessed in the world—real estate, Durham motor stock, and a few miscellaneous stocks and bonds. The bank was to realize on these assets as rapidly as possible, and account to him for any balance. Lee's collateral was worth at least two hundred thousand dollars; but on forced sale, it was dubious whether it would bring enough to pay the endorsed notes.

He was furious at Fred Badger, and consulted Malcomson about the legal aspects of the controversy.

"Ordinarily, that's a good technical defence—trust your friend Badger for that." The lawyer waxed profane. "But in this case, where you three all agreed in advance to endorse these notes, I think we have a chance of sticking him. At that, I'll bet he's got his property tucked away in his wife's name, so that he'll be judgment-proof. We'll give him a run for his money, anyhow."

His financial downfall was hard enough for Lee to endure; but the hurt to his pride was ineffably worse. The newspapers were irritating. After the first shock of surprise, their attitude toward him became more and more contemptuous. They were calling him the "Would-be Automobile Magnate," "Soap-bubble Hillquit," and other names. One consciously righteous sheet ran a long editorial on the folly of "this much-heralded and much over-rated young man. May his pitiful collapse be a lesson in conservatism to the youth of Detroit!"

This attitude was reflected, for the most part covertly, throughout the whole city. Lee noticed that many of his friends—particularly those in "Society"—failed to recognise him on the streets. A more serious manifestation of the public's hostility crystallised in the bankruptcy proceedings. At the first meeting of creditors, a certain combative lawyer representing several claimants announced that he expected to prove that the officers of the Hillquit Company had been guilty of such gross mismanagement and negligence that they could be held individually liable for the corporation's debts.

For three days, Lee, on the witness stand, was hectorred and browbeaten by this quarrelsome attorney—his weaknesses and ignorance as an administrative officer laid bare to the public, his errors of commission and omission sneered at. In reality, there was no evidence of the sort of mis-

management that was being charged against him, but the combative lawyer, working hand-and-glove with the newspaper reporters, succeeded in securing the publicity that he coveted for himself.

As usual, Lee had to take the entire load. Fred Badger was asked only a few perfunctory questions on the stand; and from the attorney's possession of certain "inside" facts about the company's history, Lee suspected that Fred had furnished the information and thereby purchased immunity for himself. Will Eaton had left the city shortly after the first crash, and betaken himself back to Boston, strewing in his wake certain uncomplimentary references to "*gauche*, loud-mouthed Westerners."

V

IT happened to be the afternoon of the day before Christmas when Lee was finally excused from the witness stand in the Referee in Bankruptcy's office. Sick at heart, sore of spirit—smarting from a hundred wounds to his pride—he debouched irresolutely upon the street.

He paused to light his pipe, then bethought himself of a note that had been handed him just before he began his concluding testimony. The message proved to be from Howard Doman.

"DEAR LEE:

Can you stop in for a moment this afternoon? I want to see you,

DOMAN."

Lee returned the letter to his pocket and began walking slowly toward Woodward avenue. On every street-corner, he heard newsboys crying—saw black head-lines:

HILLQUIT IS SHOWN UP.

He sighed wearily.

All at once, he espied a familiar figure half a block away. Swift recognition came to him. It was Bob Hamilton—in some sort of uniform, it appeared.

Bob had seen him, too; and they hurried up to each other. Presently Lee made out the words on Bob's visored cap: "Salvation Army."

Seven years had worked recognisable changes in both of them, and in the midst of their fervent hand-shaking, they

were unconsciously studying one another's faces. Bob looked older. There were new lines about his eyes and mouth. His face was thinner. Somehow the new lines and the thinness combined into an expression of strength, of assurance. His old self-distrust was gone. His lower lip had ceased to tremble. His voice was steady. From the eyes that used to grow moist with the sense of failure now emanated a look of radiant tranquillity.

He told Lee that after his sudden disappearance he had just drifted for a time.

"One day the Lord spoke to me," he said. "I think He'd been speaking to me all my life—only I hadn't listened. And He'd caused all my seeming failures. He'd been directing my whole life, but I didn't realise it. On this particular day, the Vision came to me at last—just as it did to Saul—and I understood. And now I feel He's close to me every hour of the day."

Bob's conversion had occurred at a Salvation Army meeting four years back, and he had promptly joined the organisation.

"You look happy," Lee observed.

"I am very happy," said Bob. "I'm doing His work and I'm under His guidance. Perhaps you don't know what a sense of peace that can give a man. Duties that might seem disagreeable to you are my life's greatest joy—helping the wretched, the poor, the sinful."

Lee felt controversial. "But do you think they're worth it?"

"Worth it?" Bob seemed vastly surprised. "Of course they're worth it! Every one of them is a child of God."

The two friends said good-bye at length; and Lee continued his walk, consumed with wonder at their odd meeting and his old roommate's curious destiny. Bob, it was evident, was tingling with happiness. His transcendent faith seemed to have solved his problem of life. His ecstasy of

spirit was unmistakable. Yet Lee remained far from convinced. Bob's talk about "Him" impressed Lee as over-emotional, almost maudlin.

"It's just a kind of self-hypnosis," he reasoned. "Bob's just kidding himself. As for me—I want the truth. I'll take life with eyes wide open and without any mental drugs—no matter how much it hurts."

He continued on thus, till he came to the great store of Curran & Company. He had hardly set foot inside it since the death of Michael Curran, but he was familiar with its wonderful growth and prosperity. Howard Doman had taken over all of the upper floors of the adjacent buildings, and thus doubled the original floor-space.

Just outside the big entrance-ways that were sucking in and spewing out the thousands of Christmas shoppers, Lee hesitated. A sense of overpowering confusion rushed over him. The ordeal of returning to the scrutiny of all the employes, a deeply disgraced and toppled idol, transfixed him with aversion.

Once inside, though, he found himself greeted warmly by an aisle-manager, saluted with the same old friendly deference by an elevator boy, and recognised without overt disdain by a dozen others. Somehow the atmosphere of the place was unmistakably cordial—almost homelike. Even the familiar pervasive smell of drygoods enveloped him pleasantly.

Howard Doman broke up an important conference of department buyers to give him immediate audience. "Lee, my boy, it's a treat to set eyes on you." He stood for a moment surveying his former assistant with affectionate regard.

Almost at once he came to the point. "I want you back here with us, Lee," he said. "I've been wanting you back ever since you left. Will you come?"

Profoundly deep gratitude made speech difficult for Lee.

He gripped the arms of his chair hard for a moment. "I don't know," he finally managed. "I don't seem to have much ambition for anything right now. I've thought some of opening an advertising office of my own—as a free lance."

Doman sat studying his face. "Better wait a year or two for that," he counselled, "till the wolves stop yelping at your heels. Besides, there's so much more need for you right here at Curran's. I'm trying to do big new things. It'll be a man's size job for you—and a lot more vital than writing ads. Then, too, the human contact will help you a lot."

Lee stood up suddenly. He was afraid of bursting into tears. "I'll let you know before New Year's," he decided. "My answer will probably be 'yes'—though I'm not at all fooled by all this talk about Curran's needing me. Anyway, I can't tell you——" His fatal habit of gulping abruptly strangled his speech.

"None of that!" Howard Doman clapped him on the shoulder. "I'm purely selfish about it. I'm looking for a first class man to take my place five or ten years from now." His alive perceptive eyes softened with understanding. "You know, Lee—you've grown up since I last saw you. You've had the one thing you needed—a big, sobering smash-up—every good man must have it before he can come into his own—and now at last you've really begun to live."

VI

A LITTLE later Lee ate at a serve-self restaurant, and then set out in the general direction of the inexpensive rooms he had rented—not far, it happened, from Mrs. Holmes' house, his first Detroit residence.

Darkness had come on and it was beginning to snow—a soft powdery snow that settled down swiftly and silently over the city. The downtown streets were packed with a jostling, slow-moving mass of late Christmas shoppers—a colorful, absorbing, kaleidoscopic flux of humanity. He looked at the people's faces, finding an inexhaustible interest in capturing some fugitive hint of the riddle of a thousand different personalities. They were all so different from one another, these people. Each one of them had some precious, elusive essence that distinguished him from his fellows.

It struck him that the crowds were better-natured than usual. He saw few sombre faces. Every one was laughing and talking vociferously. Lee was bewildered until he remembered the season. Christmas—that was the solution. Next week, perhaps, all these faces would resume the mask of infelicity; but to-night the spirit of love beguiled them into happiness.

It was a queer puzzle, he reflected.

He left the downtown section and continued on rather aimlessly, his intellect grappling with the occurrences of the day—his trying hours on the witness stand, his curious encounter with Bob Hamilton, his reinvigorating talk with Howard Doman—attempting, as was his mental habit, to find the logical sequence of things.

His truant mind began straying back over the events of his eight years in the city—his first high hopes and strivings, his thwarted pettinesses and vanities, his struttings and posings, his blindnesses and stupidities, his profound and bitter disillusiones.

"A groper," he whispered to himself, "now and always—stumbling, floundering, following false lights, at intervals catching a real gleam of truth. And I am all men—blind and stupid and only half awake—creeping forward and upward an inch or two each hundred years. Groper's all."

Vera, his dead mother, Oscar Eberenz, Hauxhurst, O'Neill, Mrs. Curran—how the portraits began trailing across the screen of his memory, as he trudged vaguely on through the snow. Dolores, Howard Doman, Fred Badger and Helene, Inga Brandt, Mike Curran, Ellwood James—how they tumbled over one another, without reason or consecutiveness, into one strange phantasmagoria. Still they came: Bob Hamilton, Bernice Kohler, Will Eaton, Renée Reynolds, Eleanor Badger—most inscrutable and inexplicable of all. Puppet-like they had come and gone on the stage of his life, each with his little bow, her little mental gesture. Each had left his little impress on Lee's soul, then vanished. Were they real—or were they dreams of his?

He speculated, with a detached interest, along what paths his future lay predestined—whether he could ever break through and shake off the encompassing chrysalis that stifled him, and come at least partially to himself. "You've grown up," Doman had said. He questioned the truth of this. He knew he felt older, less mercurial, a little more patient and reconciled with life, perhaps; but he could as yet find within himself no tranquillity, no self-sufficiency or certainty, no spiritual poise.

He continued his tramp, unconscious of time and distance, a solitary figure holding the film of life up to what light he had, striving passionately to decipher some inkling of

its meaning. The material aspects of existence fell away from him. He became a disembodied mind.

All at once the sound of music brought him out of himself.

Across the street a group of people carrying lanterns were singing a Christmas carol:

Noel! Noel! Noel! Noel!
Born is the King of Israel!

He stopped and listened. The softly falling snow, the simple loveliness of the old carol, the spirit of the thing, all gripped him indescribably.

The sight or sound of real beauty in any form always seemed to carry him back momentarily to his last days at Chatham, to those few final hours when Vera and he had felt the ecstasy of first love. He wondered where she was this magical Christmas Eve. He had not seen her since he had helped her get her divorce.

Quite unaccountably her words flashed into his mind: "I have implicit faith in you." He wished fervently that she might be with him now, listening to the Christmas waits. They had turned a corner, but he still caught their faint carol:

Noel! Noel! Noel! Noel!
Born is the King of Israel!

He took note of his whereabouts for the first time, cut across to Woodward avenue and began walking toward his rooms. It had grown late. Quite inadvertently he observed the glaring lights of a small moving-picture theatre just ahead of him.

As he passed the theatre, a woman hurried out of the exit-door, half slipped on the icy entrance-way, and collided violently with him.

"I beg your pardon," she said.

It was Vera.

They walked down the avenue together. The last time he had seen her, she had appeared half-dazed, crushed, somewhat slatternly in her dress. But now her mood was almost volatile, and her tailored suit trim and attractive. All traces of her incipient grossness of body had vanished.

She had read of Lee's financial troubles. "I'm awfully sorry," she said. "I didn't believe a word they printed about you."

A few corners farther on, she paused. "This is my street." An idea reflected itself in her face. "Don't you want to come up to the room a minute and see him?"

"Who?" asked Lee.

"Why—the baby!" she laughed.

The slight tension between them broke down. As they took to the cross-street, Vera explained that she looked after the baby mornings, but in the afternoons and evenings, when she had to play at the "movie," the landlady's daughter assumed control. "He sleeps most of the afternoon and night anyway," she added. "It's not ideal, of course, but it'll have to do for the present."

They came to a dingy brick rooming house and climbed two flights of dark stairs to Vera's shabby little bedroom.

The baby was crying, it happened; and Lee noted the eager swift movement with which Vera took him away from the loose-jointed, untidy landlady's daughter.

"He's a-been carryin' on this way ever since you left," reported the girl, and disappeared.

Almost at once, the baby began smiling through his tears.

Lee stood by, with a sense of being wholly superfluous. He glanced about him. The room looked very bare in the gas-light. For furniture it contained a cheap bureau and wash-stand, a cheaper iron bedstead and a couple of chairs. Yet he could not help observing the scrupulous neatness of the place.

"What's his name?" he thought to ask.

"I hope you won't mind," she said, and her face became a trifle worried. "I called him Lee."

He was aware of an instant's extreme repugnance, but he came up to the mark nobly. "I'm very proud to have a baby of yours named after me," he asserted.

The baby kicked and gurgled violently just then, and Vera completely forgot her guest once more. He watched her with deeper and deeper admiration. Life had done its cruellest to this woman, yet somehow the fire had refined and seasoned her, made her strong of heart and pure of soul. The perception of her courage and stalwart self-reliance, her inexhaustible wealth of tenderness, left him unspeakably moved.

She turned to him.

"Isn't he the most wonderful baby in the world?" she demanded.

Lee took one of his namesake's tiny fingers in his hand. "Poor little fatherless tike," he said to himself; but to Vera, he agreed, with impeccable gravity: "The most wonderful, by far."

After a moment, he took up his hat. "Do you know, Vera," he said, "I've never seen any one look happier than you do this instant—with that baby in your arms."

"Happy?" She laughed, then held the baby aloft in her arms and gazed up at him adoringly. "I've never known what real happiness was till now, Lee. Why, I've just begun to live."

"Just begun to live?" He looked at her intently. "That's exactly what a man told me about myself a few hours ago."

An even greater light came into her eyes. "I believe it's true," she said, as she held out her hand to him in farewell.

Suddenly and quite unaccountably, a vivid picture leaped into his mind—the image of Vera and himself on Mount

Phillis that last Sunday afternoon. And now, eight long and painful years afterwards, they faced each other in this dreary little room, standing beside Vera's cheap iron bedstead.

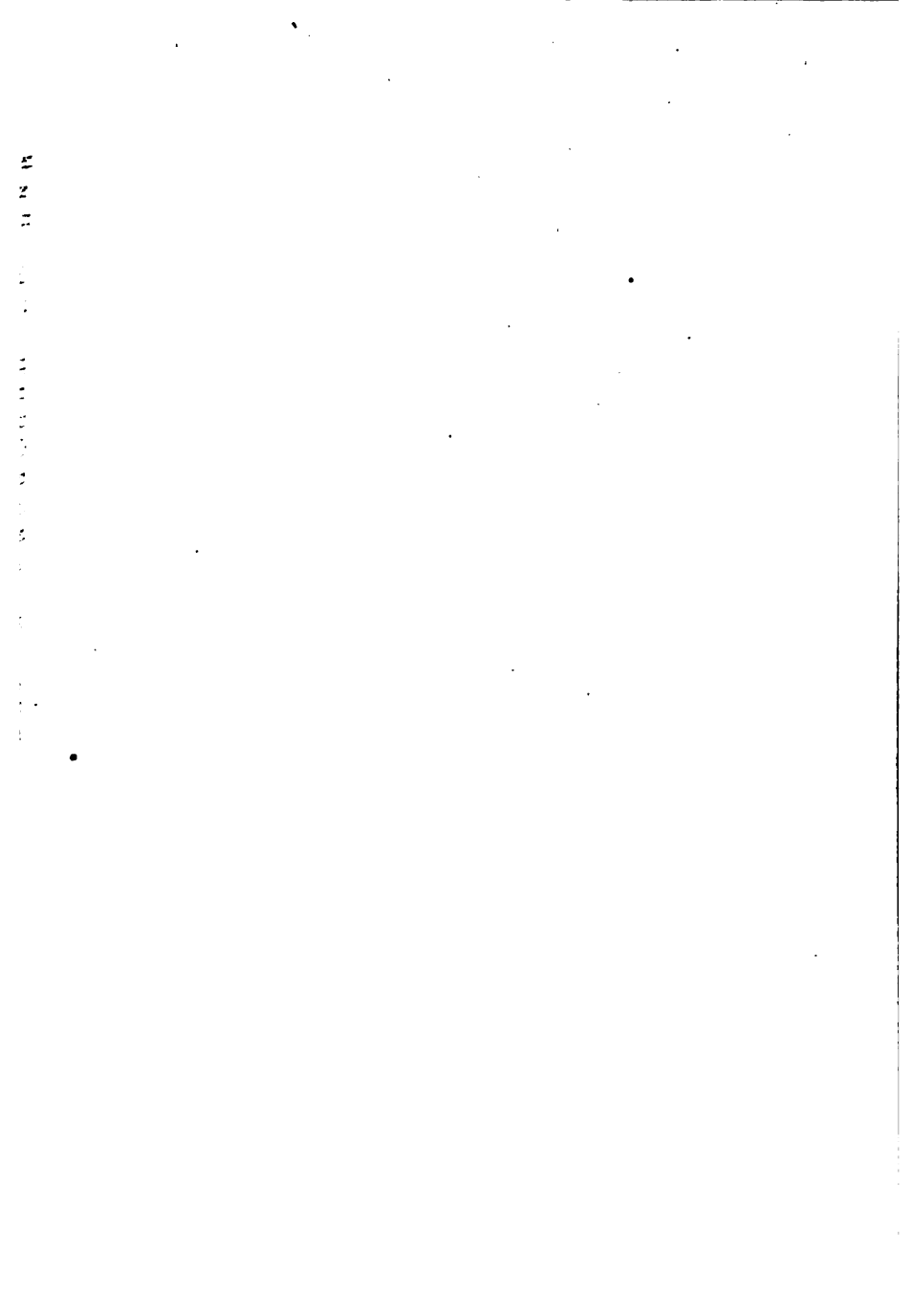
"I've always had implicit faith we would both really begin to live some day," Vera added, and looked up at him proudly.

At her look, Lee became conscious of something new and inexplicable taking form within him—the germ of a regenerating faith in himself, the first faint intimations of the fundamental integrity of his own lonely soul. Then a tremendous wave of feeling welled up in him, quenched a last lingering whisper of skepticism, of self-abasement, and rushed out tumultuously to meet the pride and the tenderness—and the unspoken need of his help—in her eyes.

"Vera," he said, and took her hand.

He watched her expression slowly change, as she stood there—her face illumined in the yellow gas-light, her left arm clasping the baby tightly, her right hand beginning to tremble a little in his—the bewilderment in her eyes gradually giving place to a look of certitude, of joyous self-surrender.

THE END.



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